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## FOREWORD

*The philosophies of one age have become the absurdities of the next, and the foolishness of yesterday becomes the wisdom of tomorrow.*

**Sir William Osler, Acquanimitas and other addresses**

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## **Wagner, Wagner über alles!**

**By: David Brockschmidt**

The intellectual mass murderer, racist, Jewish antisemite and plagiarist Karl Marx is celebrated in today's Germany as a German cultural icon. For Richard Wagner's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday the half educated, unelected and unwanted left-wing elite, and the political class in Germany has a special birthday present for one of Germany's greatest musical geniuses, Richard Wagner, who is celebrated world-wide. They declare him wahnsinnig-utterly mad, and of course antisemitic, a spiritual twin brother of Adolf Hitler.

The world, of course knows that Wagner was not utterly mad but sane and a genius. The schizophrenic intellectual and political class in Germany must have their heads read. They have become the laughing stock of the musical and intellectual world. These children of Marx and Coca-Cola are really a sad legacy of the Frankfurt School. They are also the victims of Denis Sefton Delmer who was the chief of the British Department of psychological warfare in and after World War Two. The intellectual and cultural elite of Germany, once the country of poets and thinkers, has turned Germany into a gigantic cuckoo's nest as in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. Thank you Denis Sefton Delmer, you won the war but lost the peace.

The accusation that Wagner's music is antisemitic is another non-brainer. Richard Wagner had more Jewish friends and colleagues he worked with than most of the other composers and musicians of his time.

He called his home Villa Wahnfried in Bayreuth, 'my synagogue'. The parasitic Karl Marx, living off the capitalist Friedrich Engel's money and tortured by his Jewish self-hate, had no Jewish friends at all.

So, I ask the question: Who is utterly mad here – Richard Wagner or the brainwashed cultural elite in Germany today?

I rest my case.

David Brockschmidt - Adelaide - 22 May 2013

## AFTERWORD

*Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going back and beginning all over again – André Gide*

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*Man must suffer to be wise, comfort creates the opposite of wisdom – Aeschylus*

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# Richard Wagner at 200

**Michael Tanner on why we should celebrate the controversial German genius, born 200 years ago**

**Michael Tanner 13 April 2013**



'The overpowering accents of the music that accompanies Siegfried's funeral cortège no longer tell of the woodland boy who set out to learn the meaning of fear; they speak to our emotions of what is really passing behind the lowering veils of mist: it is the sun-hero himself who lies upon the bier, slain by the pallid forces of darkness — and there are hints in the text to support what we feel in the music: "A wild boar's fury", it says, and: "Behold the cursed boar," says Gunther, pointing to Hagen, "who slew this noble flesh." The words take us

back at a stroke to the very earliest picture-dreams of mankind. Tammuz and Adonis, slain by the boar, Osiris and Dionysus, torn asunder to come again as the Crucified One, whose flank must be ripped open by a Roman spear in order that the world might know Him — all things that ever were and ever shall be, the whole world of beauty sacrificed and murdered by the wintry wrath, all is contained within this single glimpse of myth.' That magnificent tribute is part of Thomas Mann's great lecture-essay 'The Sufferings and Greatness of

Richard Wagner', given on the 50th anniversary of the composer's death in 1933. Mann the great ironist is here at his least ironic, paying homage to the artist who counted for more in his life than any other. Yet the lecture, delivered in Munich two weeks after Hitler came to power, earned him 12 years of exile, for his alleged 'lukewarm and patronising praise'. No one nowadays is likely to be exiled for praise, lukewarm or otherwise, of Wagner, except possibly in Israel. But Wagner remains a figure of violent

contention, just as much as he has ever been. And trying to get people to see him in a less contentious light is itself likely to lead to accusations of *parti pris*, ignorance of his use for political purposes, or simply of a failure to realise that, more than any other artist of comparable fame and stature, his work, and every other aspect of him, is inherently controversial.

What Mann tried to do in that doomed lecture, and others have tried to do with no more success, was to take Wagner out of his particular context, and to stress the universal, the trans-temporal, the mythic in his work. One difficulty with that approach is that the work does call forth responses of such intensity that it is always in danger of being hijacked in the service of one or another cause. Mann was aware of that, but his attempt to remove it from the cultural and political circumstances of Germany in 1933 was bound to be seen as something more than merely that — and rightly, since in such a situation everything is politicised.

Can we, 80 years later, move on? For though the political circumstances are utterly different now from then, in Germany and the rest of the West, the debate about Wagner seems stuck in much the same rut that it was in then, though with many more sophisticated appurtenances. It's still routine for a new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* to be criticised for failing to confront the work's nationalism, even though it

is evident that Sachs's words about 'holy German art' are concerned to stress what is permanently great about a nation's achievements, in contrast to evanescent political debates. If anything, the alleged political subtexts of Wagner's music-dramas are of more concern now to Wagner scholars than they were in the first half of the 20th century.

Yet, supposing it had been established that Wagner intended the Knights of the Grail in *Parsifal* to be concerned with purity of Aryan blood — something that no one studying the work itself, however intensively, could possibly surmise — where do you go from there? How much of your attention, while listening to or watching a performance of *Parsifal*, will be absorbed by that subject, and how will that relate to your total experience? A work's subtexts are only interesting if they serve to illuminate the actual text, rather than making a bid to substitute for it. But the debate will go on.

I came to praise Wagner, but found myself, as I have for so long, trying to defend him instead. That was inevitable, since though his bicentenary has led to many new productions of his oeuvre, so many of them are of a reductive or distorting kind that one feels that his incomparable contribution to culture, which should be being celebrated, is instead being held up yet again for critical questioning. That is not happening with the other bicentenary, that of Verdi,

and perhaps it can be seen as a tribute to Wagner that he generates, still, so much discussion, while it is hard to imagine Verdi leading to much discussion at all.

What Wagner should be celebrated for, it seems to me, is precisely what he would have wanted and what Mann in the passage I quoted put so eloquently: his music-dramas have the unique quality of drawing us into the particular situations which they explore, so that, for instance, we can experience times without number the slow growth of passion between Siegmund and Sieglinde in Act I of *Die Walküre*; while they incite us, from the depth and scope of the subjects they present, to ponder the most basic questions about the relationship between our needs and ambitions on the one hand, and all the compromises that civilisation imposes on us on the other. Wagner's major characters make more exorbitant demands on life than any others; and usually they are more terribly thwarted than any others too. If Wagner failed, in his immense and penetrating works, to provide answers, how many other artists have ever presented the questions in such uncompromising yet alluring terms?

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts/music/8884791/in-defence-of-wagner/>

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## Richard Wagner's Jewish Friends

### A strange Anti-Semitism

By: Milton Brener

Richard Wagner, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century German composer of opera, has long been noted for his strident expressions of anti-Semitism. The most opprobrious of these has been his infamous *Judaism in Music*, an essay published in 1850 at the age of 37. Apart from the racist tone, it

states in essence that Jews were capable of neither creating nor appreciating great art. It is with justification that he is today deemed a racist, thorough and through, with the bulk of his contempt directed at the Jews as a

sub-population in his native German land.

Little noted by modern writers however is the fact that his racism seems exactly the opposite of the modern variety. Post Hitler almost no one admits to harboring such tendencies, even the many

exhibiting obvious racial or religious prejudice in their daily lives. It was the opposite with Wagner. He expressed in speech and writing his overt animosity toward many groups, most explicitly toward *the Jews*, whom he seemed to target as a group, like some amorphous entity. Strange to say, but a fact nonetheless, in his dealings with individuals, he judged by only one attribute, namely whether the individual supported him in his life's work, or opposed him. What ultimately mattered to him was not race or religion, but the realization of his artistic goals, his concept of art. Good and bad, right and wrong, were judged by that one criterion. With many of his close associates, including many Jews, he developed warm, close, and empathetic relationships.

We might begin with one young Jewish man named Samuel Lehrs, a struggling philologist. Lehrs was one of three of Wagner's close friends during the composer's two year sojourn in Paris as a young man, beginning almost ten years before his infamous essay. He, like his three friends was battling for recognition and even for basic survival. Wagner, hopelessly in debt, and earning next to nothing, was helped by the labors of his wife Minna. But his empathy for his very sickly friend, Lehrs, was boundless. In April 1842, Wagner and his wife left Paris for Dresden, but his concern for his friends centered most on Lehrs, whom he felt he would not see again. In his autobiography, written about 30 years later, in his mid-50s, he credited Lehrs with his own introduction to and absorption with philosophy, and in large part with his interest in medieval poetry. It was also Lehrs who had furnished him with source material for two of his early operas.

He continued to correspond haltingly with Lehrs, and with his other Paris friends, to whom he eagerly sought news about Lehrs and his condition, chiding them

when they sent what he felt to be insufficient information. He ended one of his letters with "I don't want to know anything about you, only about Lehrs." He finally heard again from Lehrs directly about a year after leaving Paris. Wagner responded "Be of good courage, my dear brother. Sooner or later we must be together again... enjoy the beautiful spring air which will bring you strength." Lehrs died a few days after receiving the letter, and Wagner wrote his younger sister that the news left him dumb, speechless for almost 8 days. It was "heartbreaking... This brave wonderful and so unfortunate man will to me be eternally unforgettable." In his autobiography, begun at age 55, he said his relationship with Lehrs "was one of the most beautiful relationships of my life."

Another of Wagner's unforgettable relationships began in May 1858. The 45 year old composer was living in Zurich as a fugitive from Saxony, having participated in an unsuccessful uprising. The new friend was a 16 year old Polish Jewish lad, a student of Wagner's friend, Franz Liszt, and an extraordinarily talented pianist. His name was Karl Tausig, and he bore a letter of introduction from Liszt. He exhibited to Wagner his virtuosity on the piano. That meeting came 8 years after his infamous essay about the Jews.

Wagner was almost literally swept off his feet by what he heard. The childless composer took not only an immediate deep interest in the youth for his musical skills, but also a surprising paternal interest. He assisted in finding him nearby living quarters. The boy was a frequent visitor in Wagner's home where they took many meals together, and together they often made mountain hikes in the towering Alps that abounded in the Swiss countryside. In letters to his wife, then living temporarily in a hospital, as well as to Liszt in Weimar, Wagner waxed most eloquently

about the virtues of his new friend. They parted in August when Wagner left for Venice alone. The stark incompatibility between him and his wife, surfaced again after her release from the hospital, and finally resulted in separation.

In Paris, he also had a very close and friendly relationship with the Jewish composer Jacques Halévy, a composer, 14 years his elder. Wagner tells us in his autobiography that he had a very high opinion of his "masterly talent," and that he enjoyed his many talks with the "peculiarly good hearted and unassuming man." He also explained that it was Halévy's candor, in assessing the worth or lack of it in contemporary music that "justifies the participation of all Jews in our artistic concerns." While writing for a musical journal in Paris, Wagner's essays were filled with laudatory comments about Halévy's operas.

Wagner again met Tausig in May 1861 in Vienna, Wagner's residence for the next three years. In Vienna, as in Paris, he had also had three close friends, two of whom, this time, were Jewish. One was the 26 year old Heinrich Porges, a musician of some talent, but whose greater talent seemed to be writing about musical matters. The other was Tausig, at 19, no longer merely boyish but, in many respects, more an equal of his famous composer friend. Tausig soon introduced him to Peter Cornelius, the only non-Jewish member of the new triumvirate. Cornelius was then 38 and had his own plans to write opera.

About Tausig, Wagner wrote to Minna that "the confounded boy" was just as amusing as ever, but not so insolent. He wrote a little later to her that "Little Tausig... helps me now and then to a playful smile." About a year later the three friends gave a three concert series of his music in Prague. Wagner laughingly told Porges that this was the first money he earned from his compositions.

In 1864, Wagner's fortunes changed dramatically. One of his most ardent admirers, Ludwig II ascended to the throne as King of Bavaria upon the death of his father. Ludwig was willing, even eager to help the increasingly frustrated composer, finances being one of the means of doing so. Tausig, at this time, was heavily engaged with other matters, both artistic and romantic, but Wagner quickly wrote to both Porges and Cornelius asking them to come to Munich where he had relocated, and cast their respective lots with him. To Porges he made a generous offer of money (from the Bavarian treasury) and living quarters of his choice. His duties were to be those of secretary and copying of business matters, manuscripts, and musical arrangements, which, he wrote, would not be burdensome and would be better than the "dreary business" of giving lessons, which he was now doing. His letter to Porges, his Jewish friend, read in part: "If you accept you will make me very happy! You know of course that the secretary is merely an excuse for having my friend here with me. If you wish to bind your life to mine... you will, I hope, never have cause to regret it. And how important, how splendid, and how reassuring it will be for me to have my witty and friendly companion here beside me!"

Porges, at that time refused the offer, but shortly thereafter spent so much of his time working so closely with the composer for the balance of Wagner's life that he might as well have.

The biggest and most daunting challenge was the production of Wagner's grandly conceive "Ring of the Nibelung," a four opera series, requiring the building of a new theater, and would make extraordinary demands on the artists, and on the necessary scenery. It could not be paid in its entirety by the Bavarian treasury. Financing was perhaps the most important challenge.

Wagner turned to Tausig. His young friend's ideas for raising funds, new at the time, included the formation of "Wagner Clubs" throughout Europe and America. He worked out the idea and the details of a guarantee fund to be paid by patrons through the sale of "patron certificates," offering free seats for all the performances. In one of his letters, Wagner described Tausig as the "life and soul of the project." But, as happened all too frequently, in that as in earlier centuries, illness struck suddenly and lethally. In Tausig's case it was typhus. He died in July 1871 at age 29.

Wagner was devastated. He complained to his second wife, Cosima, about the "stupidity of fate, snatching Tausig away" when he had so much to live for. That night, he dreamed about Tausig. A week later he spoke to her about the melancholy of nature and himself. "Since Tausig's death I have no will for anything except business matters and the children's lessons. I just cannot manage to write personal letters." A year later he wrote a short poem as an epitaph placed on Tausig's tombstone. It lamented his so premature death and paid tribute to his courage. In May 1873 came a 19 page report to the patrons of the Festival Theater then under construction in Bayreuth. He acknowledged the help and support of many friends and acquaintances, but only one did he mention by name: "The exceptionally talented and energetic Karl Tausig embraced the matter as a task peculiarly falling to himself." The short poem Wagner had written for his friend's tombstone was repeated in the report.

There were other close friendly relationships with Jews in this period, some of them spanning Wagner's entire life. Among them should be mentioned the Lehmann women, Marie the mother of Lilli Lehmann, who made her mark in the world of music as a Wagnerian soprano, and of her other daughter, also named Marie, who was

distinguished from her mother by the nickname Riezl. Wagner was friends with all three women, but his favorite was Lilli. Both sisters sang in the first "Ring" performances in the Bayreuth Theater in the summer of 1876. They were two of the three legendary Rhinemaidens in the first and last operas, and two of the Valkyries in the second opera. Lilli also sang the offstage role of the Woodbird in the third opera.

Wagner was well, and justifiably, known for being brutally frank in his expressed opinions about artistic performances, particularly in his own works, and seemed constitutionally unable to give more praise than he felt was justified. For Hans Richter, the conductor of the performances who earned much praise from others, for one example, Wagner had none, and several years later described in writing his disappointment in Richter's performance. But to his Jewish soprano Lilli Lehman he wrote: "Oh, Lilli, Lilli! You were the most beautiful of all – and you are right, dear child, it will never come again. That was the magic of it all – my Rhinemaidens ... Greetings to Marie, she is so good. Great God, how good both of you were...Farewell, dear good child! Lilli!" In 1886, three years after Wagner's death she sang the lead female role at the Metropolitan Opera House in the first American performance of *Tristan and Isolde*. In Munich, Wagner continued his efforts to enlist Porges in his various ventures, particularly after the talented writer turned his efforts in preparing for King Ludwig a comprehensive psychological analysis of Wagner's very new and powerful *Tristan and Isolde*, completed in 1859, but not performed until 1865 in Munich. Wagner tried diligently to find gainful employment for his friend. He offered Porges a position as one of the administrative offices, or "artistic business leader" for first production of the recently

completed operatic comedy, *The Mastersingers*. That projected performance did not occur. But through his efforts Porges was appointed editor of the arts pages of the *South German Press*, a publicly subsidized newspaper formed to propagate Wagner's works. When a new music school was completed by Ludwig in the same year, with emphasis on German opera, meaning Wagnerian, Porges declined Wagner's attempt to get him to join the faculty. The following year Wagner wrote a lengthy letter to Ludwig bemoaning the reluctance of Porges to join his circle of friends in Munich: "He almost alone fully understands me and my truest intentions. Yet he stays aloof." He wrote that he would not consider the school "completely finished if Porges will not take a meaningful part in it." Wagner was successful in having Porges appointed music director in Munich. In February 1872 he

conducted Wagner's *Lohengrin* in that city. A few days later Hans Richter wrote to Wagner that Porges had conducted the opera so badly that he would not conduct again. Wagner's reply: "I can never forget it when someone has behaved well toward me. It was he who arranged the concert in Prague for me, and in the evil days in Vienna he was the only one to whom I could turn. So he can go on sinning for quite a while before I strike him off my good books." There is much more to Wagner's relationship with individual Jewish friends and admirers which will be dealt with in one or more successive hubs. In addition to more on Porges, there is Josef Rubenstein, a difficult but gifted piano virtuoso, who begged to be allowed to help Wagner in the preparation for his *Ring* operas and ultimately did so, not only for those operas, but for Wagner's final opera *Parsifal*. For about ten years he

lived in the Wagner family home as a welcome, but difficult member of the family. There is, also yet to be discussed, Angelo Neumann, the Jewish impresario, to whom Wagner gave exclusive rights to produce the *Ring* operas all over Europe; and there is Hermann Levi, son of a rabbi, with 12 rabbis in his previous ten generations. He was selected by Wagner to conduct *Parsifal*, Wagner's final opera, and based on Christian legends. The composer insisted he would have no one but Levi, and resisted all objections based on religion or any other matter. All of these will be treated in some detail in later hubs. The material is to be found in my book *Richard Wagner and the Jews*, ordering information on my website [www.miltonbrener.com](http://www.miltonbrener.com).

<http://miltonbrener.hubpages.com/hub/Richard-Wagner-Jewish-Friends>

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ANDREW GRAY

## ERRORS, LIES AND NONSENSE ABOUT WAGNER

[Delivered at Adelaide Institute's International Revisionist Symposium, 9 August 1998.

Andrew Gray's translation of Richard Wagner's autobiography *Mein Leben*, is still in print. Article from No 84, *Adelaide Institute Online*, December 1998]

Nobody blames Lenin on Tolstoy - and they were contemporaries. I think Lenin was 40 years old when Tolstoy died in 1910, and Tolstoy's later ruminations on collectivism in the latter stages of his life were useful to Lenin, who adored him when putting together those doctrines, or whatever one wants to call them, which resulted in Stalin's Leninism. But an entire world industry blames Hitler on Richard Wagner, and Wagner died six years before Hitler was born.

It's very difficult to characterise the fatuity of such a debate, discussion, 'Geplapper', or whatever. The Germans have also the term 'Geschwafel'. The German language has wonderful words for this kind of thing, but whatever it is, it is world-wide. It goes on and on and on, and as we speak here another symposium is taking place. And it's taking place in Bayreuth under the Schirmherrschaft des

Bundespräsidenten, Dr Roman Herzog, and it's called "Wagner und die Juden". It's taking place over a series of five days, from the 6th to the 11th. We Revisionists are much more modest.

I'll just read you this from the fourth day of this interminable stream of guff, I'll read you some of the titles of the lectures. Professors have turned up from all over the world but the two main ones are from Tel Aviv University and the University of Heidelberg. And here are some of the titles that they are discussing right now:

Professor David S Katz is discussing "Wagner, the Jews and the Occult Tradition". I mean, you may just as well be discussing his dogs, for that matter. Professor Rudolf Behrenbach is discussing "Anti-Semitism als ästhetisches Program" — anti-Semitism as aesthetic doctrine. Professor David Lange is lecturing on "A mirror of

the Master. The Racial Theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain". Professor Paul L. Rose is lecturing—this is on the final day now—"Wagner and Hitler after the Holocaust". Dr Dina Porac of Tel Aviv University is lecturing on "The Impact of Wagner's Concepts on the Nazi Movement". This is on the fifth day. By this time they must be glassy eyed. Even a friend of mine is lecturing. They've given him the time of 8.45 in the evening. He's lecturing on "Thomas Mann, Wagner and the Jews". If anybody at 8.45 pm is either sober or awake, it will absolutely be amazing. And the last one, the final word, will be by Dr Lana Sheshik, who is going to lecture on "Wagner-Israel, from the ban to the creation of a symbol, 1938 to 1997". Well, there seems to be almost no end to it, but the one subject they fail to touch upon is Wagner himself. They deny it. I mean, that

is what's completely lost in this unthinking and this monumental detour around the subject which they make.

There was in circulation in the 1920s an old League of Nations anecdote. It's partly apocryphal but it's apropos. Elephants were an endangered species in the 1920s. There was a League of Nations commission founded to look into it. It was a multi-national committee, and it had each member looking at some specific aspect of the elephant problem. The Frenchman supposedly took the elephant and the reproductive cycle. The Englishman took the ivory trade and its implications. But the longest of all disquisitions was by a Pole who reported on 'The Elephant and the Polish Question'.

You can always take a subject and get it by the tail. One can always indulge in some kind of subject completely self-referentially, and of course that is what has happened here. It is true that you can say Wagner was concerned in his life about virtually every conceivable problematic aspect of the civilization. Any kind of problem - vivisection was such a general problem. He didn't like cruelty to animals. Any single aspect of civilisation was a problem and captured his attention.

He certainly didn't like newspapers and he saw horrible dangers in journalism. I mean his genius was anticipatory in so many respects but I think he saw the age of the mass media coming, and he found the German newspapers of his time completely and totally irresponsible with respect to his own art, which they in fact were. But one of the things that Wagner research does now is to go back and look at the evidence. That at least is something - go back and see what actually was written...

From the time he got back to Germany from Paris in 1842, and from the minute he set foot in Dresden and began to announce himself, with what Bülow later called Meyerbeer's best opera - *Rienzi* - from this new beginning, he encountered a kind of massive distortion, hostility and really gratuitous insults in the public press.

It was bound to upset him sooner or later. I mean, this sort of thing is bound to upset anybody and it

seemed to be from his standpoint the one thing the critics would not do was address themselves to the works of art themselves.

Then, you know, came Tannhäuser. 'Oh, it's Catholic propaganda', unbelievable nonsense from day one. He looked at the mass media, at these papers, and he saw great danger in this. And by the 1850s it occurred to him that there was a Jewish presence among the music journalism of the time - and there is no question that there was.

In going into Wagner's biography it is of course terribly dangerous to say anything in public categorically because the likelihood of error is enormous. In his life we have it year by year for the first 25 years, but then we have it month by month. By the time he gets to Dresden, we've got it week by week and by the time he gets to Zürich in his years of Swiss exile, we've got it pretty much day by day. That's the kind of scholarship that's gone into this and by the time Cosima starts keeping her diary it is hour by hour. So the manner in which people write casually on the subject never ceases to amaze me because of the primary documents are all there. 5,000 letters, and there is now under way a publication of every letter he ever wrote. They're now at Volume 9 which takes you to the year 1857. There will be 30 volumes that will not be completed during my life-time. That's the kind of dimension of scholarship that goes on - and all this editing, every last letter is still annotated. So if you talk about Wagner casually there is trouble, you'll be in the soup very quickly.

Nevertheless, I will make a guess concerning the first real stage of his resentment which then took form in this polemic for which he was never forgiven - *Das Judentum in der Musik*. It came from his inability to get Tannhäuser performed in Berlin. Tannhäuser had its premiere in September in Dresden in 1845. I'm sure most people know this work. It's one of the great gifts to German opera. It's to the Germans what *La Traviata* is to the Italians. I mean, he gave them the most German of his works. You could not give a greater gift than what he gave, and what he did for mediaeval Germany. If you go to the Wartburg today, you can see the second act of Tannhäuser, right there

physically to look at. And it's difficult to understand why he could not get this opera accepted, really... Why was Berlin so important? The reason was that it was the only German theatre that paid royalties. The German system prior to 1870 was tilted against independent artists and composers because what the court theatres would do would give you a lump sum payment for all rights permanently. The lump sum payment that Wagner would get for say Tannhäuser from the Royal Court Theatre in Hannover was 2,000 florins, let's say. It would be equivalent to \$4,000 but nothing on which you could base an existence. Nothing on which you could buy or build a house of any kind. You know, Wagner did not have a roof to call his own over his head until he was nearly 60 years old. These are just facts, and if after creating works that have been the centre of the lyric stage ever since, and he managed to become a little bitter about money - think of the system. Verdi was a wealthy man by the time he was 50. The rules were different. He was blocked. He did blame Meyerbeer, the Berlin court theatre. Meyerbeer controlled the northern European stage. The Paris Opera was in Meyerbeer's hands. These operas were the central money makers, the central core of the repertoire of the time. They have more or less vanished from the theatre of today. It's hard for us to remember how dominant they were. And Meyerbeer - Wagner concluded it was Meyerbeer who was blocking the path intentionally. Well, the evidence for this is very mixed because Meyerbeer was terribly careful where Wagner was concerned and there is no smoking-gun tape in which Meyerbeer said, "I don't want that bastard's operas performed here". Nothing of that kind, nothing.

Nonetheless, he ran up against a stone wall in the Berliner Intendantz, year after year in 1846, 1847. I mean, he did manage to get *Rienzi* performed there - by that time he regarded it a 'Jugendsünde' - a sin of my youth. It was one of the reasons for his own money troubles and his own desperation which led him to participate in the Dresden uprising of 1849.



In the autobiography he was wonderfully candid, almost across the board. It's a very accurate work. It's often termed as 'here's Wagner spinning tales', this and that. No, no. It is an extremely accurate work, except for two matters in which he is less than candid. One is the extent of his participation in the Dresden uprising. I mean, he makes it appear in his autobiography as if he were a bystander and a cheer leader, sort of saying 'Go to it, I hope you win', and that sort of thing. But, oh no, no, he was the number 3 man. He was right behind Heubner and Bakunin. Three men led that: Heubner, Bakunin and Richard Wagner. The argument is about the charges against him - if caught he would have been sent to death. He certainly would have been sent to prison and he escaped while Heubner and Bakunin were sent to jail for many years.

There is a biographical question: Did he personally participate in the loading of handgrenades? It's an open question whether he was actually there, filling these projectiles with powder. That's the kind of thing that's disputed. It's very possible he was. I mean, he was not a half-way person. Once he did something, he did it all the way, which is, of course, what got him into trouble with the pamphlet that he tossed off in a couple of days of anger in 1850 having landed in Zürich, penniless and in exile, and looking back at the German musical establishment from which he was then banned. He did write the brochure *Das Judentum in der Musik*. It's often translated as *Judaism in Music*. That's incorrect. 'Das Judentum' is not 'Judaism' - we don't have an English equivalent for 'Das Judentum'.

If you read it, it isn't that bad. What he is not forgiven for is saying by implication that neither Meyerbeer nor Mendelssohn - Mendelssohn, whom he names - would love to write German opera but they can't. Why can't they? Well, because as Jews they don't have the right relationship to the two great roots of music - the liturgical music (the church music), and the folksong. The dual root to a nation's music was folksong and liturgical music. I think he's completely right on that. And he asserted wrongly, as we found, Jews would not be able to

compose authentic German music. Occasionally he was wrong. He was wrong on that.

He went on to say, for which he was not forgiven, because it was gratuitous that Jewish liturgical music is without any musical value at all, and added that whatever you hear in a synagogue is a form of gargling. He did write that and again when he got started he was not the kind of man that pulled his punches. The difficulty was, when he came to publish a new edition of his collected prose works in 1869, he insisted, against the advice of Liszt, against the advice of several friends, many of whom were Jewish - Heinrich Porges was Jewish, Karl Tausig was Jewish. Two of his pallbearers were Jewish, for heavens sake! He was not the kind of man who was going to withdraw it. Instead he plunked it into his *Gesammelte Schriften* - and he has not been forgiven for that either. It was a conscious decision. He even equipped it with another preface, a rather self-serving preface and an accompanying letter to Marie Muchanoff. That was typical of him. He was not the kind of man who would back down.

If one were to grab the whole subject by the tail, when you interpret works of art of this kind by stating that they reflect the personal prejudices of the creator, I often felt how grateful we should be there was nobody to take down words from Shakespeare's last years. We know so little of what Shakespeare said and did, what the man, if indeed he is the man who did write the plays - what kind of casual comments he might have made. I'm sure he excoriated the French.

In his later years, it has to be remembered, Wagner was in very fragile health. He had a very, very severe heart condition and his survival was really Cosima's doing, his wife's doing, who watched him like a hawk. I mean, just to make certain that he wouldn't be upset, he was very irascible anyway. The slightest thing was likely to upset him. She was always there to calm him down. That's why we have *Parsifal*. That's why we have the Bayreuth Theatre, because she was there in those later years when he was frequently close to death. It would be in the diary: "Richard has a narrow escape today". It was that

kind of thing, on many occasions he would be close to death. So some of his writings in his later years and some of the statements that are quoted, are the product of temporary outbursts of irascibility. Which one of us has not at some time said things of this sort about anybody which are either irresponsible or boundlessly exasperated with different things? But these things were then excerpted and taken down and written, 'Wagner says this. This is what Wagner says. Wagner said this about so-and-so'. Not just Jews, on anything. It is entirely ludicrous to excerpt from a gigantic body of documents one line. I'll give you an example of the kind of thing that is excerpted. There was a fire in the Theater an der Wien, a very bad theatre fire, I think about 100 people were burnt to death in the fire - and they were performing *Orpheus in die Unterwelt*. When this was reported to Wagner, he burst out, "Serves them right for going to hear Offenbach".

You know, he didn't mean that, but this is the kind of thing that went hotly over the wires: "Wagner says they got what they deserve". This kind of thing has been going on for more than a hundred years and I don't know how long it is going to go on. But I think it's got to be said, the Jewish issue is just part of it. It's only a small part of it. I tell you what I think is at stake. Resentment and envy basically is at fault here because the gods did this only once. They'll never again combine that kind of supreme talent of the composer and the supreme talent as a dramatist under one brow, apart from a few other things that he could do. For instance, he was a first class architect. His supreme gift as a dramatist has baffled academia ever since. I'll bet you at the University of Adelaide they'll have a course of the history of western drama but they won't have Wagner as a dramatist. They don't know where to put him. But he is the legatee of Aeschylus. He, as the dramatist, is the legatee. He is impossible to categorize. The size of his genius - Liszt had a wonderful term: "Richard Wagner ist ein Schädelspaltendes Genie" - "a skull-splitting genius" was what Liszt called him. He was certainly 'Das Jahrhundertgenie'. He certainly was



that. We fellow Wagnerians feel he was 'das Jahrtausendgenie'. The envy, I think, at the tap root of this general uproar - this endless, endless backbiting, this gratuitous malevolence, envy and discomfort is really at the base of it. Resentment, too. He said once to his wife - this comes from the diaries - every two pages there are little asides, she is very good at jotting down his casual remarks. She's a smart woman. She knows when he's said something memorable. On one occasion he said, "I robbed music of its innocence". What did he mean? What he means is what he's never been forgiven for, of course. He sees that human sexuality pervades music, all the way up to the most sublime realm. In this case he certainly anticipated all of psychiatry, all of Freud, effortlessly. And second, the works themselves. He's the grand master of the sublime, but into the music is composed, decisively and inextricably a sense that the entire bid for transcendence may be in vain. You see, that's where Der Ring is. I hope you're going to get a good production of it. In an authentic production of the Ring, the fundamental question will be posed right away, and the fundamental question is: is there any transcendental meaning at all, or are we entirely subject to natural law?

What do you see? At the opening of Das Rheingold, you see the natural world in its most innocent stage, the three Rhinemaidens representing the natural world. Subaquarous, they represent the unconscious itself. That's the world before it was penetrated by human reflection and conscious intelligence. There they are, swimming around and notice the first line of Der Ring. This is by a man who is always accused of being much too verbose and going on and on forever, taking up time on things. The whole work begins:

Weia! Waga!

Woge, du Welle!

Walle zur Wiege!

Wagalaweia!

Those are playful sounds the two nouns have crept in - 'Welle' and 'Wiege'. What has happened to the world? Yes, language has entered it. What does it mean? Reflective consciousness has entered it. And

guess what? The symbol of reflective consciousness turns up. What is the symbol? Well, it's an ugly dwarf. It's not a very attractive character in its early days. Why is it ugly and why not very attractive? The process by which reflective intelligence came into the world, so far as we know, was not a very clean one. All of this is understood by Wagner long before Darwin published The Origin of the Species. Rheingold was written in 1852.

Now, pay attention to the text, which unfortunately very few stage directors these days do. Take a look at what is said between Alberich and the Rhinemaidens who tease him, of course.

The first thing the Rhinemaidens see is he's clumsy. You see the stage directions - he has problems climbing on the rocks. He's not very agile. He doesn't move very well. What he says to the Rhinemaidens is that it's easy for you - they do it by pure instinct. He's got to learn everything. That's what consciousness does. It compels you to learn to do things that other creatures do instinctively.

But he's turned down by the first of the Rhinemaidens, who represent the natural world and are indifferent to him, just as they are indifferent to Siegfried. The natural world doesn't care about us as individuals. Listen to the music in Götterdämmerung, Act III. That is one of the reasons why it has such enormous emotional force. The stream of time, the river, is entirely indifferent to the hero. Heroes come and go. The river and time remain - it's in the music. Only Wagner could do that!

What else does Alberich say? The first Rhine maiden turns him down, and Alberich says "I'm glad there's more than one of you because if there was only one of you I wouldn't have much of a chance". What's the meaning of that line? He's accepted the law of probability as governing the world, the natural world, which it does. Probability governs our lives.

It is only when all three Rhinemaidens reject him that it occurs to him, well, the Rhein may move on but it's not necessarily going to help him individually - one of nature's horrible truths. And it's only then that the ray of sunlight pierces the flowing water, a musically sensational moment

among so many - and illuminates the gold at the base - a large block of raw gold.

And please, directors, please, do what Wagner says. Let the ray of sunlight illuminate the raw gold. Please don't turn it into a municipal water works or something else. Please don't try to have some artificial symbolism of 19th century capitalism. Please do what Wagner asked.

I assume what you're going to get is a very spare, lean production here in Adelaide. But maybe you'll be lucky enough. Maybe they'll pay attention to his stage directions.

And Alberich stops transfixed, as does everybody, transfixed by the music. And what does that stand for? Guess what? Reflective intelligence itself is represented by this ray of light on the gold.

The gold is a symbol of many other things besides, and I'm not saying that the anti-capitalist interpretation of Der Ring is wrong. You can take Der Ring as class warfare, but that's not a central part. Reflective consciousness has penetrated - there it is, and what is to be done with it? Well, it occurs to Alberich, 'I can do something with reflective consciousness. Instead of chasing these women who won't pay attention to me, maybe something can be done with the brain itself'. And he steals the gold, and takes the gold and brings it up above the surface. Above the surface, that is a symbol of bringing it into consciousness. He takes it up to his factory in the mountain and forges a ring. It's been said that if a symbol is easily defined verbally, it's not a hell of a good symbol. The 'ring' has so many aspects as a symbol, we'd be here all day. But it certainly does stand for the essence of reflective consciousness.

It's Alberich who puts it to work. It's Alberich's ring. It's Alberich who finds out what you can do with reflective consciousness. What you can do is all kinds of things. You can put your brother to work forging the Tarnhelm, for example. Don't forget that Rheingold was written three years after wire telegraphy had been invented. The electronic age had begun and again Wagner catches this - he knows this. The electronic age is implicit and the Tarnhelm stands for that, doesn't it? Wagner gets the point - it stands for instant transferability -

'Er entführt flugs dich dahin'. He catches all that. The difference is that Mime who can make it, doesn't own it. He can't control it. It is the one who made the ring who controls it.

Well, that's the first scene of Rheingold. We are off to the races for the rest of Der Ring. It just beggars belief that I have to read from people whom I know personally in New York or London, to say nothing of some others that Alberich is a specific Jewish caricature. If you want to believe that you can say "Very like a whale". If that's the way you want to interpret this scene, there's not much point in arguing, is there?

I said that I'd talk about errors, lies and nonsense. Since the errors, lies and nonsense are oceanic, we would certainly be here far too long even to get under the surface, much less to any great depth. I suppose this nonsense will be with us permanently because Wagner raises all the hard questions. No other composer raises as insistently as he does the basic fundamental philosophical questions?

For example, Parsifal, a work that I adore, I do not take as an assertion of the Christian faith at all. I take it as a farewell to transcendence, and the bid for transcendence. I believe that if you look closely and listen, you can see that Wagner leaves the ultimates open. He's much too modest and sensible to say categorically this is the way existence is and this is the way philosophical truth is. It's all open. Finally, everything is speculative, that's the way art is. You can't

possibly know what Shakespeare really thought about anything.

You can take Parsifal as a farewell to transcendence, and that we have to consecrate, we have to bless the existence we've got because it's the only one. But you can use it as an affirmation of a divine realm, a realm of being other than the one we have. I don't think the case for this is terribly good, and I think if you listen to the music you will hear he has managed to smuggle into the music the agonizing doubt. What do you think the wound of Amfortes represents?

And the music represents the fatal doubt. It is a question. The question is posed, but I don't think it has any doctrinal interest. Wagner asked all these impossible questions - what is music? What is the relationship of music to society? What is the relationship of music to the other arts? What is the relationship between words and music? - just a simple aesthetic question like that. He posed them, he poses them all. Since his works pose them all, I assume that the controversy is going to go on and on, and I suppose it should. One would hope that sooner or later we'll get away from 'the elephant and the Polish question'.

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**Richard Hornung:** You very enthusiastically affirm Wagner, do you think that Nietzsche is a bit of an aberration when he clearly had a split with Wagner?

**AG:** Nietzsche certainly adored the man and his own life was one of the great tragedies of the time. Nietzsche had a failed love affair

with music which was not successful and he never quite gave up as a composer. The products show, as Wagner said, a modest gift, but nothing that he could place much money upon, and certainly Wagner said, stick to your knitting. Nietzsche was a very self-obsessed person who certainly used Wagner as a foil to define himself. What really happened between them and what Nietzsche said happened is just a day and night difference. The answer is the meeting with Wagner was absolutely crucial for Nietzsche, absolutely fundamentally crucial.

**Arthur Butz:** I think it was about 10 years ago, English philosopher, Brian McGee, published a little book in which he claims that Wagner was right in his booklet *Das Judentum in der Musik*

**AG:** Who would it be? I should know, many people have suggested he's not entirely off base in stating what Meyerbeer represented - Meyerbeer is the Andrew Lloyd Webber of his time. Wagner was vindicated in the artistic ideals he opposed to Meyerbeer's. He won across the board. Again, part of the resentment is that those who criticised him took such a beating. Those who fought on the barricades against him took a horrible beating, and still do. I'm sure there's been a public protest that *Das Judentum in der Musik* is not the kind of brochure other people say. It has nothing to do with a political program of any kind. It has nothing whatever to do with National Socialism, nothing, nothing.

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## An exercise in Germanic self-hatred Maligner of a Great Ancestor

By: GUILLERMO COLETTI, *INSTAURATION*, FEBRUARY 1997, PAGE 11-12.

Last October I attended a lecture at Occidental College by Dr. Gottfried Wagner, great-grandson of Richard Wagner, the German composer, on "Richard Wagner's Anti-Semitism: Consequences for German Culture and Politics Until Today."

As I patiently waited for the lecture to start, xeroxed copies of an article on Gottfried Wagner, published in the San Francisco Examiner (Oct. 6, 1996), were distributed. It was

written by a young, German-speaking Asian male, perhaps a member of Wagner's entourage.

Wagner's grandson is a very sad success story of the de-Nazification (read de-Germanization) process perpetrated upon a militarily defeated Germany. "I am an alternative German," Wagner describes himself. According to the interview in the Examiner, Wagner's indoctrination started at age 9,

when he was made to watch films of his own family socializing with Adolf Hitler (the Wagners affectionately called him "Uncle Wolfie"), followed by clips of alleged piles of dead Jews at Buchenwald, scenes all too common in the methodology of anti-Axis propaganda warfare. Wagner revealed he had severed all ties with his family when he accepted an invitation in 1989 to speak about

the Holocaust at Tel Aviv University. Now at age 49, Wagner is occupied full-time lecturing internationally on what he calls "Germany's conspiracy of silence." The article also quotes him as saying, "Richard Wagner was a negative genius, an erratic moment in the history of music, important, but ultimately evil."

The Examiner article should have been adequate warning for anyone half-way savvy on matters of anti-German propaganda of the nature of the lecture to come. A well-groomed man, Wagner's manners were unmistakably European. Except for those moments in which he was contradicted, he displayed a full measure of courtesy. The audience of about 50 was composed of a variety of individuals, from typical Generation-X college students to a wide range of Semites, some old enough to qualify as "survivors." There were also some faces that seemed suspiciously and unapologetically Aryan and consequently out of place.

Wagner brought a script to the podium and adjusted the entire lecture strictly to that script. The lecture was videotaped by a small crew consisting of a young, German-speaking Asian male and a few German-speaking Asian females.

A visit from Gottfried Wagner offers American college students an interesting opportunity to meet in person one of those individuals who emerged from years of harsh anti-German brainwashing. In his magnificent 1947 essay, "Nuremberg or the Promised Land," Maurice Bardeche observed that the enemies of Germany have begun one of the cruelest tasks in recorded history, "they not only plan to make the Germans accept defeat, but they also expect them to be happy about it!"

Today Germany in some important ways is intellectually and spiritually more of an occupied country than it was at VVWII's end. The humiliation

inflicted upon German nationals extends from street corners in red light districts infected with Turkish pimps to propaganda in the classrooms of the Bundeswehr-Universität, where an Israeli Professor, Michael Wollfsohn, teaches German history the Jewish way. He takes full advantage of this opportunity to spew his racial hatred when stating that Germans of earlier generations "carry the mark of Cain for the murder of millions of Jews." (The biblical fable of Abel and Cain refers to fratricide, brother murdering brother. The conflict between Germans and Jews, needless to say, has nothing to do with fratricide.)

While listening to Gottfried Wagner, I could not help recalling the report published by several mainstream magazines, showing a tearful son of Adolf Eichmann, emotionally embracing the Mossad agent who kidnapped his father in Buenos Aires, as he thanked him for the abduction that, ultimately, led his father to a Kangaroo court in Tel Aviv. Gottfried Wagner is another one of those "alternative" Germans who are vocally joyous about the defeat of their homeland.

Gottfried Wagner's militant Zionism has a clear set of identifiable goals. Coinciding with the submissive attitudes and behavior of all de-Nazified individuals, Wagner is also de-Germanized and misses no opportunity to advertise it. In his lecture, he attempted to convince his audiences: (a) that anti-Semitism is inherent in German Nationalism and not limited to National Socialists; (b) that German Nationalism is a contradiction in terms, since there is no real German national identity; (c) that his great-grandfather was an anti-Semite primarily because of his negative emotions, lack of self-esteem and envy for the superior musical talent of Felix Mendelsohn; (d) that anti-Semitism is unique and finds no parallel; (e) that America has no need to repeat the mistakes that Germans have

committed in the past; (f) that the discussion of the immigration issue in America should not be influenced by isolationists.

Gottfried Wagner's diatribes against his great-grandfather are for the most part based on obscure and unsubstantiated remarks, such as, "Richard Wagner's real father might have indeed been Jewish." No evidence was introduced to support this statement, which by Gottfried's own admission, had no foundation. He emphasized several times that his great-grandfather had an inferiority complex because, among other things, he was short, skinny, weak, ugly and had Jewish facial features. All of which amounted to utter balderdash. He went on to state that Cosima Wagner (Richard Wagner's wife) was also of mixed ancestry, "the illegitimate granddaughter of a Jewish merchant."

Gottfried Wagner argued that the concept of a German Volk is absurd, since "Germany was not founded until 1871." Saying that a German Volk is nonexistent is just as absurd as saying that there is no real Italian national identity because the Italian Republic was founded in the last century by Garibaldi. These national formations were inevitable historical consequences in the lives of societies that are rooted together, in contrast to the "social designing" attempts to form Yugoslavia.

Gottfried Wagner mentioned his desire to stay involved with the arts and listed a few of his philanthropic commitments. One of his projects, he declared, involved producing the majestic works of "a great contemporary American composer, Michael Shapiro." How noble of Mr. Wagner, to cross the Atlantic and show his generosity by huckstering the creative dreams of Michael Shapiro.

Some 90 minutes into his incessant harangue Wagner suggested that the homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz were inspired by the music of Parsifal. I politely raised

my hand at a fleeting moment when he separated his eyes from the script. I just had to throw some light into this inquisitional darkness. He invited my question with a very clear, "Ja." "Excuse me," I said, "but I believe that there is no forensic evidence for those alleged gas chambers." At that moment the air grew very *tense*, as I became the focus of attention of many pairs of hateful eyes. The silence was absolute, except for one or two deep inhalations. Wagner's expression showed total disbelief. Raising his voice, he barked out, "What?" I repeated my question, but never obtained an answer. A member of the audience shouted, "This room is full of Nazis!"

Instead of answering my question, Wagner lamented that he was not used to being questioned in that manner. He added that was the very first time "that" had happened to him. Gottfried's assistant, a man in his 40s, said loud and clear, very loud and very clear, that interruptions were "not to be tolerated!" Herr Wagner continued reading his script, with some signs of nervousness, such as mispronunciations of English words and clearing his throat with pronounced frequency.

As the lecture dragged on, Wagner became more irritated by additional interruptions from members of the audience, who manifested their discontent over his unending display of German self-hatred. As

the irritation continued, he slowly abandoned his initially displayed good manners and courtesy.

A final word. My comments on Wagner's lecture are not intended to discourage anyone from attending his future conferences. On the contrary. He and his hateful message should be extensively publicized. I only wish that every American could attend one of his sermons, if even for only one hour. His unabashed propaganda would make a Nazi out of Mother Teresa.

<http://instauratononline.com/pdf-files/Instauraton-1997-February.pdf>

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**Richard Wagner's magnificent epic tale *The Ring Cycle* begins in Adelaide on 16 November and ends on 12 December 2004**

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## **Wagner's Ring Cycle: A Political Metaphor?**

**Paul Andrews argues that Wagner's great epic carries an important racial-nationalist message**

**Adelaide Institute Online Newsletter No 226 October 2004**

Richard Wagner is quite rightly considered intellectually 'dangerous' by today's liberal establishment. Wagner's music embodies everything most hated and ridiculed by left-wing intellectuals: racial nationalism, romanticism, honour, heroism, beauty and historical awareness.

Rejecting the ugliness and squalor of the industrial age, Wagner looked back to Europe's ancient Germanic and Celtic past for his subject matter. It is for this reason that his music was later championed by nationalist political regimes of the 1930s.

Wagner's work is distinctive in that it is almost entirely operatic; also unusual is the fact that the librettis for his operas were written by the composer himself — a task normally reserved for a poet or literary notable.

### **Dilemma**

Left-wingers, who monopolise control of the artistic and intellectual life of the West today, face something of a dilemma with Wagner. They hate everything the

composer stood for, and yet they cannot ignore his genius. His works are therefore still performed, but with an attempt to 'sanitise' them, for example utilising Jewish conductors (Sir George Solti, James Levine, etc.) or more recently by the use of non-white singers in the principal roles. Since 1945, the staging for Wagner's operas has been perverted by 'modernist' trappings. Thus, in modern productions, the story is liable to be set in a concentration camp or a Soviet tractor factory rather than the setting originally intended by the composer.

Of all the great works of Richard Wagner, the most 'political' is the cycle of operas known as *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelungs*). The plot of this work has striking parallels with the political decline of the West during the 20th Century. Did Wagner intend the *Ring* as a kind of political warning?

As the cycle begins, the ancient Norse gods are masters of the world. Other races (giants,

dwarves, humans) are merely their expendable servants. A situation comparable to late 19th Century Europe's domination of Africa and Asia?

The gods, led by Wotan (Odin) have established a civilisation of wealth and culture, in part by exploiting the labour of the other races. The giants for example, are tricked into using their strength to build a great hall, Valhalla, for the gods.

### **Hideous Race**

Unfortunately, the gods are not as secure as they think. A hideous race of dwarves, the Nibelungs, are also greedy for world power. This power is represented by a hoard of gold from the depths of the Rhine, and specifically a gold ring.

At first, the gods think they can use the Nibelungs just as they have harnessed the power of the other races.

But the Nibelungs are a dangerous foe because they fight not with brute force but through trickery. Like parasites, the Nibelungs wander upon the earth stirring up trouble against the gods whom they

hate and envy. These dwarves believe they are the 'chosen' who will one day rule the world.

The gold is eventually stolen by the giants, one of whom turns himself into a dragon and sits upon it until his death — Wagner's illustration of the pointlessness of materialism.

Wotan realises he must recapture the gold before the Nibelungs get hold of it and use it to gain world power. he eventually creates a (human) hero, Siegfried, whom he hopes will defeat the Nibelungs.

As an orphaned baby, Siegfried falls into the clutches of the Nibelungs Mime and Alberich, who try to trick him into using his strength to capture the Rhinegold for the dwarves. The Nibelungs are revealed as a truly repulsive race. They try to win Siegfried's help first by threatening him, and then nauseatingly begging for his sympathy by claiming that they are 'persecuted' by the gods.

When they think that they are about to get their hands on wealth and power, the Nibelungs squabble over it and Mime kills his brother Alberich. But he in turn is killed by Siegfried, who realises that the Nibelungs are no more than evil parasites who were only pretending to be his friends.

For a while, it seems as if the world will be saved. The hero Siegfried

kills the dragon and recovers the gold. His bravery and magical weapons make him seem invincible. But the Nibelungs' credo of vengeance leads to tragedy. Just as it seems Siegfried will conquer (and thus save) the world, the evil dwarves have one last trick up their sleeve. The drunken and boastful King Hagen (himself part Nibelung) literally stabs Siegfried in the back, thinking that he will thus win power for himself.

With the death of Siegfried, the world falls into chaos. Valhalla goes up in flames, the gods are destroyed and the Rhine overflows its banks, submerging everything. If one compares the complex plot of the Ring with the tragic historical events of the twentieth century, the similarities are almost uncanny. Obviously, Wagner could not have predicted the events of 1939-45, but he certainly had an insight into the racial conflicts which could lead Europe to such a disaster.

#### **Personal Qualities**

The character of Siegfried contains those personal qualities which Wagner felt belonged particularly to the Germanic peoples: honour, generosity and bravery to the point of recklessness. In addition, Siegfried possesses the physical qualities of youth, beauty and strength.

In direct contrast is the personality of the Nibelungs: they are hideous dwarves in both the physical and the moral sense. They are greedy and cunning, interested only in wealth and in destroying anything that is beautiful. Hateful and hate-filled, they are driven by jealousy of the gods, and by their desire for vengeance. They have no common culture or community spirit and only work together briefly for a materialistic goal. When that goal is achieved, they end up squabbling viciously amongst themselves.

They believe that they are the 'chosen' race who must one day rule the world, yet they have no creative imagination; instead, they can only exist as vicious parasites, working for the destruction of their enemies.

The *Ring* is in many respects a gloomy work. Evil triumphs over good, the great hero is killed and civilisation lies in ruins.

Yet even in the midst of this catastrophe, Wagner's story offers hope. For after the great destruction, the waters of the Rhine are seen to recede, with the implication that the struggle is not yet over.

Perhaps the gods are to be given just one last chance...?

<http://www.adelaideinstitute.org/newsletters/n226.htm>

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**[Here is a piece by a musicologist who has since passed away, possibly because of having suffered from 'emotional mutation' that robbed him of moral and intellectual security and wellbeing – ed.]**

### **WAGNER AND HEALTH**

**Malcolm Fox, 25 September 1997**

Most people agree that Wagner's music has a powerful emotional effect. But hardly anyone explains how he does this. I am a composer and so I will tell you.

There are three specific techniques Wagner uses to increase emotional impact of music. There are:

1. The abandonment of sectional form;
2. The use of chromatic harmony; and
3. The avoidance of tonality.

#### **Abandonment of sectional form**

Most music we listen to [suites/variations/sonatas/symphonies] is divided into sections or movement.

Most operas are also constructed in sections [overture/recitative/aria].

Sectional structure is psychologically beneficial for two reasons:

1. It does not place undue stress on the listener's concentration span as the listener's concentration span only needs to cope with one section at a time.
2. It induces a sense of security as it provides a clear aural framework in which the component parts can be related to the whole.

But not Wagner – who rejects the sectional form in favour of a continuous musical texture [through composed]. He also extends the

overall duration of opera to colossal proportions.

So: When we listen to a normal opera we can mentally subdivide each act into small sections of about 10 minutes each; but in Wagner each Act is a continuous section as long as many conventional operas.

To use a literary analogy, Wagner's music is like a 3 Act play in which each act is a continuous sentence. This places enormous demands on the listener's powers of concentration.

#### **Use of chromatic harmony**

This is the technical term for music which uses lots of notes foreign to

the key. Music which mainly uses notes from the key is called diatonic harmony. Here is an example of diatonic harmony [play]. By adding some foreign notes we can turn this into chromatic harmony [play].

As you can hear, chromatic harmony increases the level of emotional tension in music. Wagner's use of chromatic harmony is the reason why our emotional response to his music is so extreme.

So, while Wagner's avoidance of sectional form stresses our powers of concentration, his use of chromatic harmony induces a more extreme emotional response.

### **Avoidance of tonality**

Tonality is the sense that music is in a key; being in a key is a feeling that a certain chord is home [C]; this is called the tonic, and because we are brought up with tonal music we relate to it instinctively.

Now, in a tonal piece you don't need to stay in the tonic all the time; you can move to other keys [demonstrate]. This is called modulation. But you always come back to the tonic at the end [C].

This is like starting from home, going on a journey and returning back again. Tonal music creates a sense of psychological security; because no matter where you are you know where home is.

In order to establish the tonic as home base the composer needs to stay in the tonic key for a large proportion of the piece. Most pieces composed before Wagner (and during his lifetime) start and end in the tonic key and spend at least fifty per cent of the time in it.

But Wagner's music modulates constantly without staying in any key long enough to establish it as home base; this is called continuous modulation.

In the Ring Cycle each Act starts and ends in a different key. So in Wagner there is no sense of a tonic key; it is called atonality. Of course, other composers, such as Schoenberg, wrote atonal music.

But at least Schoenberg was musically honest; he made no pretence at being in a key because he used chords which were not tonal [atonal chords].

However, Wagner was musically dishonest; he used chords which belonged to the tonal system but gave them no key to belong to. The Tristan chord [play] is a good example of this. Musically, *Tristan und Isolde* could be described as a chord in a 4-hour search for a key to belong to.

Here is an example from *Tristan* showing how quickly Wagner changes key [Act 2]. If a tonal piece is like going on a journey and coming back home, Wagner's music is like going on an intergalactic odyssey, getting lost and losing the map.

One of the most important chords in tonal music is dominant 7<sup>th</sup> [V7]. The progression from the dominant to the tonic [V7-1] is called a perfect cadence; it is the single most important progression in tonal music; it corresponds to a full stop in literature.

But not Wagner who deliberately avoids the perfect cadence. By avoiding the perfect cadence he further weakens the sense of

tonality and increases the level of stress and insecurity. A good example of this occurs in the scene between Brünhilde and Waltraute in the first Act of *Götterdämmerung*.

For about 20 minutes we have been moving continuously through various key centres. As Siegfried approaches there is a tremendous climax. We hear the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> of F major [play].

At last, we believe that we will reach a tonic chord. However, at the critical moment the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> resolves onto a dissonance [play] with a scream superimposed over it. Here it is [play tape].

### **In conclusion**

Wagner's music creates the effect it does because he removes the security of tonality, removes the security of structure and within this uncertain environment he induces powerful emotions which are left unresolved through the avoidance of harmonic resolution; and he does all of this over an enormous time span which stretches our powers of concentration and our emotional reserves to an unhealthy degree.

I will close with a quotation from the *Monthly Musical Record* of 1 June, 1882:

*Herr Wagner's avoidance of full closes and the immense predominance of dissonance over consonance put a strain on the nerves which becomes often painful, and cannot be endured for the length of time exacted by the composer without causing utter prostration.*

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## **Don't be scared of Wagner**

**Many music-lovers are wary of the great composer. But opera novice Sameer Rahim, who was hooked by the magic, mystery and music of 'Parsifal', believes we should all surrender.**



By [Sameer Rahim](#) 7:41PM BST 20 May 2013





**Not scary: Bryn Terfel in 'Das Rheingold' at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York Photo: New York Times/Redux/Eyevine**

Wednesday marks 200 years since the birth of Richard Wagner, the most violently controversial musician in history. His Italian contemporary Verdi – born in the same year – is acknowledged as a genius for all time. But Wagner, though he has the more passionate advocates, also has the most determined detractors. Why, they complain, are his operas so heavy-sounding, so terribly long, so full of weird mythical figures? In short: why are they so German?

When I started going to the opera not so long ago, I was asked which work had drawn me to the art form. Perhaps people expected me to say a lyrical Rossini or delightful Mozart, because I got funny looks when I said it was Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal* – the six-hour epic based on medieval legend, featuring the Holy Grail and a castrated sorcerer. "Oh," said one woman I met, "don't tell me you're becoming one of those Wagnerians?" She could barely hide her distaste.

What I loved about *Parsifal* was that transcendent music was allied to superb drama. *Parsifal*, an innocent knight, battles his way into a sorcerer's lair in order to rescue a holy spear. To succeed, he must reject the sexual temptation of the flower maidens who, like the Sirens of Greek mythology, send many a knight to his doom. It might sound a touch silly, but in an age when we're happy to read deep meanings into fantasies such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*, – surely we can be open-minded about Wagner's plots?

A bigger problem is the Nazi associations. The Nazis wrongly interpreted an opera about spiritual perfection as being about racial purity. *Parsifal* stamps were issued during the Third Reich and Hitler was painted as the title character, leading the regeneration of the German people. Wagner's defenders are not helped by the vile anti-Semitism in the composer's writings.

But there is no reason why Hitler's *Parsifal* should be ours. François Girard's recent Metropolitan Opera House production in New York stripped out the medieval paraphernalia and brought out the Buddhist spiritual aspect, to profoundly moving effect (Wagner planned to write an opera about the Buddha). It will be interesting to see what approach Stephen Langridge takes for his new production at the Royal Opera House this autumn.

Unlike other opera composers, Wagner thought like an intellectual and wrote his own librettos. Critics including Michael Tanner and Bryan Magee have delved into the philosophy that inspired the operas. The influence of Kant and Schopenhauer was deeply felt, especially in his romantic masterpiece *Tristan und Isolde*. None the less, *Tristan* grips the heart before it engages the mind. While composing the opera, Wagner wrote to Mathilde Wesendonck, the



married singer who may also have been his mistress: "This Tristan is turning into something terrible! This final Act!!!! – I fear the opera will be banned... only mediocre performances can save me! Perfectly good ones will be bound to drive people mad."

You do get an unmistakable out-of-control feeling while listening to *Tristan*. The opera is about the erotic longing between Sir Tristan and Princess Isolde. It is an unlikely pairing. He has killed her husband in battle and she is betrothed to his master, King Mark. All social and moral conventions must be defied for them to be together. The dramatic situation is musically embodied in the famous opening chord of the overture, which has a melancholy, unresolved quality that grows increasingly hypnotic. Just as the lovers break the rules, so does the music. The chord is repeated throughout the opera, still unresolved until the last moments when it is finally, almost orgasmically, fulfilled.

This kind of analysis is ripe for parody. (WH Auden joked that the title characters had to be lesbians, because "A man making love to a woman... couldn't really get into that rapturous state. He'd be thinking about something else!") But Wagner's music penetrates the soul; it taps into volatile, unconscious feelings that are hard to acknowledge. Wagner in person was disturbingly magnetic: a monumental egotist who charmed other men's wives as easily as he did King Ludwig of Bavaria, who paid for his specially built theatre in Bayreuth. He spent years gestating each opera, figuring out how to project his astonishing musical charisma.

What is regarded as his most intimidating work – and at 15 hours it is certainly the longest – is *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ("The Ring of

the Nibelung"), three full operas and a prelude. But it is actually his most accessible mature work. Unlike *Parsifal* or *Tristan*, the Ring's plot drives forward and, with its cast of dwarves, giants, gods and heroes, it is immediately appealing to anyone who likes myth. Last autumn, the Royal Opera put on the Ring in a production that was sold out for a year. This summer, Daniel Barenboim will be conducting a full cycle with a fantastic cast at the BBC Proms. When tickets went on sale 10 days ago the website crashed due to demand.

So what's so special about the Ring? As Sir Antonio Pappano pointed out in his recent BBC documentary, the Ring starts with the creation of the world and ends with the destruction of the gods. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, it features a magical cursed ring that will destroy anyone who desires it. Unlike Tolkien, though, Wagner is steeped in sex. Wotan, the head of the gods, is an all-powerful figure gradually stripped of his illusions – a bit like King Lear. His daughter, Brünnhilde, is a fearsome demi-god whose misplaced loyalty to her father leads her to being demoted to human status. Once mortal, though, she can experience the ecstasy of love.

With its conflicted characters and twists of fate, the Ring is like a Greek tragedy. It even has a spot of incest – though unlike in Oedipus Rex, the brother and sister who fall in love actually know they are related and carry on regardless. Typically of Wagner, their love duet has the most ravishing music in the entire cycle.

The music truly makes the Ring – from the opening bars of the prelude, *Das Rheingold*, that emerge from the depths of time, to the magic fire music at the end of the first opera, *Die Walküre*. Each object or character has a theme or

leitmotif that's played when they appear. This is fairly simple to follow in *Das Rheingold*, but as the cycle progresses the themes merge with greater sophistication. Like many great works of art, it teaches you how to understand it.

Wagner was a theatrical innovator as well. He was the first person to turn down the lights in a theatre when the production started in order to create a better atmosphere. **His operas are composed as musical wholes, rather than being divided into aria and recitative.** This

continuous flow commenting on the action is a precursor of the film score. His music has been used in many films and television shows: the Ride of the Valkyries from the Ring in *Apocalypse Now*; the end of Tristan in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet*; the opening of *Das Rheingold* in Terrence Malick's *The New World*; an episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* is based around the Siegfried Idyll – and who could forget Charlie Chaplin as the *Great Dictator* dancing with a globe to the *Lohengrin* prelude? John Williams clearly took much from Wagner when he scored *Star Wars* – another epic battle between good and evil.

Wagner's operas are magical creations that fully draw you into their world. He could also knock out strings of memorable tunes. Next time you're at a wedding, listen out for that popular favourite Treulich geführt ziehet dahin from act three of *Lohengrin* – popularly known as "Here Comes the Bride". Whether we know it or not, deep down there is a Wagnerian in us all.

**Sameer Rahim's column 'The Opera Novice' appears at [telegraph.co.uk/opera](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opera)**

**<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/10068907/Dontbes-cared-ofWagner.html>**

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## Great-granddaughter of composer Richard Wagner agrees to hand over private letters to determine family links with the Nazis

- This Wednesday will mark the 200th anniversary of Wagner's birth
- His great-granddaughter Katharina Wagner has said she will pass over correspondence belonging to her father to historians
- Ms Wagner's father Wolfgang was a former member of the Hitler Youth
- Hitler considered Richard Wagner as the greatest ever German composer

By [Tara Brady](#), *Mail Online*, 20 May 2013

The heirs of composer Richard Wagner have pledged to allow researchers access to private archives to determine the family's links with the Nazis.

This Wednesday will mark the 200th anniversary of Wagner's birth but his reputation has been linked to the Nazis regime.

However, his great-granddaughter Katharina Wagner has now said she will pass over private letters and correspondence belonging to her father to historians to be examined.

Ms Wagner's father, Wolfgang Wagner, was a former member of the Hitler Youth as well as a Wehrmacht soldier who ran the Bayreuth festival between 1951 to 2008.

Twelve Jewish musicians who performed at the Wagner festival at Bayreuth were murdered by the Nazis.

Ms Wagner, who is now co-director of the festival with her sister, told *Der Tagesspiegel* newspaper: 'He had a very negative to the Nazi regime and was happy that he was injured as a young man,

and therefore got sent back from the front and survived.

'He always said we can be very happy that we lost the war.'

But a well-known historian has accused the Wagner family of not being transparent.

Hannes Heer, who created an exhibition about crimes of the Wehrmacht, said Ms Wagner did not allow him to look at her father's estate. She said it had not been possible at the time.

But speaking to the *The Daily Telegraph*, Mr Heer said: 'The facts must come out about the negative role of Richard Wagner.'

'Then you can approach the great artist Wagner with a clear conscience.'

Wolfgang's mother, Winifred Marjorie Williams, was born in Hastings and married Wagner's son Siegfried.

Documents between her and Hitler have been discovered by a relative. Last year a feud broke out between members of the Wagner opera family.



This photograph was taken during the summer of 1937 shows German Chancellor Adolf Hitler talking with Winifred Wagner (centre) and her two sons Wolfgang and Wieland in Bayreuth

## A CONTROVERSIAL COMPOSER



Born in Germany on May 22, 1813, Richard Wagner went on to become one of the world's most influential and controversial composers. He is famous his epic operas which made him a favourite of Adolf Hitler.

There is evidence that Wagner's music was played at the Dachau concentration camp to 'reeducate' the prisoners.

He died of a heart attack in Venice on February 13, 1883.

Katharina Wagner said she wanted family members to turn over every document they have in a bid to exorcise the ghosts of the Third Reich -

including 'potentially explosive' letters penned by Hitler to Winifred Wagner, the Englishwoman who became head of the family in wartime.

Hitler considered Richard Wagner, who died in 1883, as the greatest ever German composer.

Because he and the late maestro both shared a visceral hatred of the Jews, the music of Wagner literally became the theme tunes of the regime.

Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries was used to accompany footage of air attacks.

The Bayreuth Festival in his honour is the hottest ticket in the opera world with a ten year delay for tickets and is attended by European leaders.

But because of Wagner's hatred of the Jews - and his family's later love affair with the Nazis - his music is banned to this day in Israel.

Katharina Wagner hopes a reckoning with a dark past will lead to a rehabilitation of her great grandfather and his works.

In October 2010 she sought to end a post-1945 boycott of Wagner's music in Israel by inviting the Israel Chamber Orchestra to play a concert in July 2011 at the Bayreuth town hall.

But her own visit to Israel was canceled after hostility from Holocaust survivors.

Katharina has previously spoken of her hopes of a 'cooperative working relationship' with members of her family - but has also threatened to go further in seeking court action to get her and other family members to open up about the past if they refuse to do so.



**Great-granddaughter Katharina Wagner with her father Wolfgang in 2007.**

**She has said she will hand over correspondence belonging to her father's estate**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2327339/Great-granddaughter-composer-Richard-Wagner-agrees-hand-private-letters-determine-family-links-Nazis.html#ixzz2Tw44xprw>



## Settling the Score

Letters to the Editor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

When critics of classical music refer to self-indulgent meandering, are they really thinking of the piercing intellectual argument of a Bach fugue, the richly elaboration of a Beethoven Quartet or Tippett's wonderfully illuminating musical essay on Corelli? Listening to such stuff demands a little concentration, but though we lose 9,000 brain cells a day, some of us have enough left to enjoy music a mite more complex than lady Ga Ga's latest piece of electro pop. — Derek Parker, Mossman.

There is no 'piercing intellectual argument' in a Bach fugue, as Derek Parker says, nor is there any such thing as a musical essay. Composers do attempt these things, but the result is rarely worth listening to. Lyrics may have intellectual content but music itself, like sex, is fundamentally intellectual. It can be refined, subtle and emotionally compelling, but an appreciation of these qualities does not require the intellect. Music is best experienced rather than analysed. — Stephen Toakley, Bondi.

IAIN BAMFORTH

# MUSIC AND METABOLISM

Quadrant January-February 2011

“WHAT'S THAT YOU'RE listening to?” asked my wife the other day. “It sounds like Darmstadt music.”

Darmstadt is the German city that was famous for its International Summer Schools for new music in the 1960s, a regular fixture in the creative calendar for names such as Stockhausen, Xenakis and Nono. To go to Darmstadt you had to be a total dodecaphonist, and (according to Hans Werner Henze) submit your manuscripts to Pierre Boulez for prior approval. That was one reason why the school, to which my wife's family in Munich had some loose connections, eventually folded.

I was listening to some pieces of music played by German musicians from the Musikhochschule Lübeck which were manifestly post-1945, post-Viennese School, perhaps even post-historical. They were otherwise absolutely unidentifiable on the musical map of the nations, although I knew their composer came from the other side of the world. The CD had been graciously sent to me in my Jakarta hotel by the composer Slamet Abdul Sjukur (who was born in Surabaya when Indonesia was still the Dutch East Indies) after an entertaining exchange of misfires—in French—on my mobile phone.

This, to my ear, was more psychoacoustics than music. Anxiously metaphysical sewing-machines were being speeded up and slowed down in taped sequence before being dramatically cut short by a succession of boisterous clacks, whistles and honks. One of these pieces, “Uwek-Uwek”, was listed as being for two “mouth explorers”. It all gave way in one piece to the aerial ejaculations of what might have been a cosmic telephone—of the kind Nietzsche accused Wagner of being (and not just of using)—or to the drone of a Zen master's communion. The nearest analogue I could think of was the zany prose of Gertrude Stein, which wants to tell us that most of life is repetition—even our most exalted moments occur against a background noise of sirens, ticks and hoots, as well as the aural by-products of car engines and vacuum cleaners. It's not that we are

mechanical beings, running on molecular clockwork; it's that so much we experience is rhythm and recombination.

But two pieces on the CD seemed to me to be true Darmstadt music, *Darm* being the German word for the intestine. (A millennium ago the city's recorded name was Darmundestat, so the contraction is entirely fortuitous. But nothing is fortuitous; the Zen master would say ...)

Both were written for a bamboo ensemble. The first,

“Orak-Arik”, translates as “scrambled egg with beans”: it is a shivering, clackety contraption for a bamboo instrument ensemble, as if the music were being produced by a fantastically

busy set of cutlery and skillets. The other piece, “Rondo Malam” or nocturnal rondo—a self-standing part of Sjukur's perhaps best-known work *Angklung*, which won the Disque d'Or award from the Académie Charles Cros in 1975—uses the same ensemble to good effect. I had the impression that the composer had actually enjoyed himself writing this music. Here was all the percussive strangeness of the gamelan tradition cheekily sabotaging the formal cadences of Western music. Here were those infernally complex Asian polyrhythms, as one percussionist slipped out of unison with another, which allowed musicians like Steve Reich to create his “phase shifting” techniques in the 1970s. But what made these pieces attractive to me was the disreputable appeal of the national, that quality in music which was so suspect after the end of the war—hadn't the Nazis conscripted Richard Strauss as their court composer? Nationalism in music was the scandal that had allowed Boulez to cast himself as the autocrat of the avant-garde, and bully others with his own rage for order.

An Indonesian friend who knows Sjukur well sighed, when he heard that I was listening to his music, “his silences are so tremendous”. I quite like his conjurations of sound-colours too. In fact, I don't think the composer would be upset at my finding his music “intestinal”. Where else does music find its intentional or unintentional satire but in imitating our only partly-conscious

MUSIC

bodily rhythms and the strange urge that humans have to extol the highest being?

Having studied for the best part of the 1960s with Olivier Messiaen (the doyen of the Darmstadt School) and Henri Dutilleul (best known for his orchestral work *Métaboles*), Sjukur is a self-confessed admirer of "French music", or as Boulez would have it the (preferably self-taught) music of individualists as against the continuity of German music: it had been first defended by Debussy as a gadfly riposte to the chromatic swoons of Wagner that were sweeping the boards across Europe at the close of the nineteenth century. Debussy had been so smitten by the traditional music played by a Vietnamese theatre troupe and a Javanese gamelan orchestra in their respective pavilions in the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889 that he incorporated their sonorities into what he advanced as the other European tradition, the anti-Wagnerian one of finesse, delicacy and understatement—lepidoptery in sound. It sought the world but it didn't want its heaviness. It was at this same exhibition that Paul Gauguin, similarly infatuated by the exotic, first thought of leaving Europe and settling in the Marquesas.

With its five-note scale, gamelan music, according to Debussy, "contained all gradations, even some that we no longer know how to name, so that tonic and dominant were nothing more than empty phantoms of use to clever little children". As a sonic adventurer, it is appro-

priate that Debussy used pentatonic scales, along with wholetones, antique modes and the usual diatonics as a new way of building towers of sound—and an alternative modernism. Debussy's orchestration was brilliantly fresh and novel, especially in terms of the geography of the orchestra and dealings between instruments, as well as being full of figurations and motifs that were quite unknown to the symphonic tradition. Even scrambled eggs and beans are poetry for a hungry person! (Much later, I discovered that Slamet had actually studied Debussy's affinity for the gamelan on a grant from the French government.)

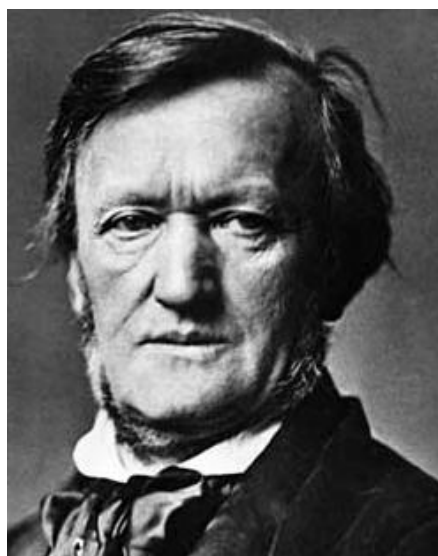
Asian composers have repaid the compliment to Debussy many times over. The history book *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* tells an anecdote about an American visitor to China exclaiming, on hearing some Chinese music, that it sounded like Debussy. The composer replied testily, "No, this piece doesn't resemble Debussy! Not at all! Debussy resembles me! Debussy resembles China!"

That's how you discover what the World-Soul resembles when your intestines are rumbling. You have a musician in your belly and you have to get him on your tongue.

*Dr Iain Bamforth is the author of The Good European: Arguments, Excursions and Disquisitions on the Theme of Europe (Carcanet).*

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## Adolf Hitler had another favourite composer - Anton Bruckner



Richard Wagner 1813-1883



Anton Bruckner 1824-1896



Adolf Hitler 1889-1945

'According to Frederic Spotts' *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, [Adolf Hitler](#) compared this symphony [Bruckner's 7th] favorably with [Beethoven's Ninth Symphony](#).

When he consecrated a bust of Bruckner at [Regensburg's Walhalla temple](#) in 1937, the Adagio from the Seventh was played as Hitler stood in quiet admiration.

A recording of the Adagio was played before the official radio announcement of the German defeat at [Stalingrad](#) on 31 January 1943 and before Admiral [Karl Dönitz](#) announced Hitler's death on Radio Berlin on 1 May 1945; a recording by Furtwängler was used.'

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony\\_No.\\_7\\_Bruckner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._7_Bruckner)

[Whenever a Genius appears on the world stage it is common practice for international Jewry to claim that person as their own, which is a natural impulse of a nomadic Talmudic mindset that has no physical home, and that resides only in an idea, and hence needs to be parasitic! The following article from Derek Strahan illustrates well this technique whereby an individual is either a 'Jew' or a friend of Jews; or those who refuse to be brought into this dialectic win-lose trick, are either 'self-hating-Jews' or 'antisemites'. Such a mindset cannot understand the complexity and depth of accomplishment that is found in Wagner's GESAMTKUNSTWERK where the emotional and intellectual are in balance. Please re-read Andrew Gray's article for a more balanced view on this point. – ed.]

## WAS WAGNER JEWISH? - An old question newly revisited

BY DEREK STRAHAN

The music of Richard Wagner is constantly being heard, on recordings, on radio, and live in the theatre. International groupies travel the world in pursuit of live performances of his opera cycle, "The Ring of the Nibelung". This constant exposure is due to the intrinsic appeal of the music, the craft employed in its orchestration, the effectiveness of his operas as music theatre, and its consequently usefulness to music organisations who can always rely on performances of Wagner's music to bring financial reward. Another consequence of this exposure, is that Wagner also remains a controversial figure, not because of his music, but because of its political associations with the Nazis before and during World War 2, and also because of Wagner's own anti-semitic writings in pamphlets published during his lifetime.



**Portrait of Wagner by Joseph Bernhardt (detail), Munich 1868, as featured in Wagner, A Documentary Study, Barth, Mach & Voss, Published Thames & Hudson 1975.**

If, as happened in my case, your initial approach Wagner is through his music, it then comes as a great shock to read his anti-semitic rantings, mainly in his infamous tract "Judaism in Music" written in 1850 to which he wrote an appendix in 1869. Although couched in the form of musical critique, there are passages in the text which overstep the bounds of artistic comment, and which can only be described as personal abuse. What is even more disturbing is that, in their emotive and irrational aspects, Wagner's prose reads like a prototype of later Nazi propaganda.

The ban on public performances of his music in Israel gives rise, from time to time, to articles and letters on the topic in mainstream papers here in Australia, no doubt as elsewhere, reviving the "Wagner controversy". One correspondent here in Sydney, Australia, pointed out that the ban is informal, rather than mandatory, and is maintained out of respect to the survivors of the Holocaust who were subjected to Wagner's music heard constantly on radio, at public rallies, and also, most offensively, in concentration camps. This same correspondent also pointed out that the ban does not extend to recordings of Wagner's music, which are available in record stores, as they are in all democratic countries.

As a composer, I find all of this troubling, since the music of Wagner as is inescapable as the music of other musical

geniuses of the 19th century, and to ignore it totally is to ignore not only the music itself, but the seminal changes which Wagner wrought in the nature of music, its composition and its performance.

To compound the irony, Wagner's influence is to be found in the work of many fine Jewish composers of the early twentieth century, including those who suffered persecution under the Nazis, and whose work is currently being re-discovered, performed and recorded, notably in the Decca Records "Entartete Musik" series. Wagner's influence is also to be heard in the work of the many accomplished Jewish composers who escaped from Europe, many of whom went to America to work in Hollywood, in the film industry. Wagner effectively "invented" many of the devices which found pertinent application in the creation of the great symphonic film scores of the 1930s, and the decades following. The controversy is not going to die quietly, and, as part of my own process of coming to terms with Wagner, I wish to explore further aspects of the various issues which arise in considering the place of Wagner's music in world culture.

One aspect of Wagner's life keeps being mentioned, in passing, by writers and commentators, but it is always in passing, often literally in a footnote by biographers, and I have come to think that it deserves much more serious attention. The question arises: was Wagner Jewish? Or, to be more accurate in terms of the facts, did Wagner think he might be Jewish? Or, to be even more specific, did Wagner think he might be of Jewish descent? From which arises the even more germane question, was Wagner afraid that he might be thought to be Jewish? While the probable answer to the latter question is "yes", a definite answer to questions relating to his parentage could only be provided by conducting a DNA testing, were this possible, on both Wagner himself, and his step-father, the successful actor and painter Ludwig Geyer (or on their descendants?)

Here again, the psychological issue is still not whether Wagner was of Jewish descent, but whether or not Wagner thought he might be, since writers differ on the question of whether or not Geyer himself was Jewish. British writer [James Beswick Whitehead](#), with whom I have discussed the matter, writes:

*Wagner's possible Jewish ancestry would be a delicious irony. It certainly appears more than likely that Geyer was his father but was Geyer Jewish? John Chancellor, in his 1978 biography of the composer, states bluntly that he was not. "He could claim the same sturdy descent as the Wagners. His pedigree also went back to the middle of the seventeenth century and his forefathers were also, for the most part, organists in small Thuringian towns and villages". Chancellor blames Nietzsche for raising the question of Geyer's Judaism as an extra seasoning to his charge of illegitimacy, when he had fallen out with Wagner. But, in his book "Wagner & Nietzsche", Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau appears to accept that Geyer was Jewish. The famous singer draws on Robert Gutman to suggest that Richard and Cosima egged each other on in their anti-*



semitism, because both had Jewish roots to deny. Cosima was the daughter of Liszt and the Comtesse d'Agoult whose maternal grandfather was a Jewish banker from Frankfurt.

(Cosima's first husband was the conductor Hans von Bulow, whom she married in 1857 and with whom she had two daughters, Daniela and Blandine. She left him for Richard Wagner in 1864, and bore Wagner three children, Isolde, Eva and Siegfried, before marrying him in 1870.)

There does seem to be agreement, however, that Wagner himself had doubts about his own parentage, and from this doubt two factors emerge which would have had a profound influence on Wagner's development. The first factor is the effect of his doubts about paternity. The second factor is the nature of that paternity.

The first factor, doubt about paternity, has been explored in some depth in the case of George Bernard Shaw, whose situation was very similar to Wagner's. The man who became his step-father, and who was probably his biological father, Vandeleur Lee, was also, like Geyer, a man of the theatre, who married Shaw's mother very soon after the death of Shaw's putative and legally registered father, George Carr Shaw, an alcoholic who was unable to provide adequate material support for his family. For some years, Lee undertook this task himself. Shaw never resolved the issue in his own mind, because it was an issue which involved a moral question pertaining to his own mother, and it is thought that this unspoken mystery deeply influenced the pattern of Shaw's relationships with women throughout his life. The matter is fully explored in Michael Holroyd's 1988 biography on GBS. But no biography has provided an equivalent exploration of the almost identical family drama which dominated in Wagner's early life, which must have been equally influential in forming his character. Coincidentally, Shaw himself was an ardent supporter of Wagner, and wrote a pamphlet titled *"The Perfect Wagnerite"*, in which he interpreted *"The Ring of the Nibelung"* as a critique of capitalism. He also analysed Wagner's debt to the philosopher Schopenhauer, who was, by profession, a merchant, described by some as a banker: which would explain his pessimistic view of life as summed up by the aphorism: *"All life is a debt. We spend our lives paying interest. The capital is repaid on death."* Those familiar with a persistent theme in Wagner's libretti, will recognise a romanticised version of this philosophy in his metaphysical poetry exalting death as the ultimate fulfilment of love, a concept which reached its apogee in the libretto of *"Tristan and Isolde"*.



**Cosima Wagner & Richard, 1872, Photo by Fritz Luckhardt, from "The Real Wagner", by Rudolph Sabor, publ. Andre Deutsch, 1987.**

But Shaw also recognised the inconsistencies in Wagner's character and wrote: *"Wagner was not a Schopenhaurite every day of the week, nor even a Wagnerite. His mind changes as often as his mood ... Wagner can be quoted against himself almost without limit, much as Beethoven's adagios could be quoted against his scherzos if a dispute arose between two fools as to whether he was a melancholy man or a merry one"*. Dating from 1908, this quip is a typical Shaw sally, making light of a serious issue to draw attention to it. To what extent does Wagner's unpredictable nature and its bewildering inconsistencies of behaviour apply to his anti-semiticism? And how much of this can be attributed to the second factor arising from his doubts about his own paternity, in relation to his having spent his childhood bearing the name Geyer?



**Giacomo Meyerbeer**

(1791-1864); a lithograph, featured in *The Wagner, A Documentary Music by Norman Lloyd, Golden Press, New York, 1968*



**Jacob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn-**

**Bartholdy (1809-1911) photo as featured in The Golden Encyclopedia of Music by Norman Lloyd, Golden Press, New York, 1968**



**Gustav Mahler**

(1860-1911) photo as featured in *The Golden Encyclopedia of Music by Norman Lloyd, Golden Press, New York, 1968*

Let us look at both sides of the coin. It is true that Wagner's anti-semitic rhetoric in his article *"Judaism in Music"*, written in 1850, is pernicious; but it is also true that that its generalities were a mask to disguise its true specific purpose which was to attack firstly the Jewish composer Meyerbeer, and later, in an appendix added in 1869, Mendelssohn. This was an ignoble way to return Meyerbeer's earlier attempts to assist Wagner's career in Paris, which correspondence of the time suggests were sincere; but Wagner later felt that these attempts were only token gestures, since they did not bear fruit: and his failure to advance his career in Paris was a deeply felt humiliation. (Meyerbeer did, however, assist in arranging the premier of Wagner's opera *"Rienzi"* in Dresden on 20 October 1842.)

In the second diatribe, Wagner also delivered a slightly muted attack on Mendelssohn, calling him technically clever, and good at evoking "nature", but lacking "depth". I can recall this charge still being levelled against Mendelssohn until as late as the 1960s. Anyone who is sensitive to Mendelssohn's music knows that this is nonsense, and I only recently realised that the slur originated with Wagner, which is why we can discount it. Wagner's attack was tactical. He was trying to create a "place" for himself by attacking others - alas, a "normal" if odious tactic in the arts, still practised widely in Australia today, and which would be thought trivial in Wagner's case, were it not for the political context in which the attack was made.

The attacks were a preparation on Wagner's part, to carve out a politically correct role for himself as a German nationalist, writing music to this agenda, as distinct from (what he



described as being) the synthetic, non-nationalist kind of music favoured by Jewish composers. As pointed out in the recent Thames & Hudson publication, "The Wagner Compendium" (2001, Ed. Barry Millington), there is some basis for Wagner's thesis, but the characteristic he condemned is not necessarily a bad one, and there is no question that Wagner was being mischievous by deriding what we describe today as an element of cultural "fusion" in music. Indeed, the ability to treat all ethnic musics with impartial interest, and to absorb their elements into original works of art music, and to create a new synthesis from disparate elements, as Mendelssohn did, is basic to the craft of composition; and, because of their exceptional ability in this regard, Jewish composers have been at the forefront of most advances in music in the 20th century. This is clearly so from the avant-garde of the New Viennese School which pioneered the use of atonality, to the adaptation of jazz to popular music, and its use in film music.



**Erwin Schulhoff** (1894 - died 1941, internment camp of Wulzberg, Bavaria) Recommended listening, opera "Flammen", Decca 444-630-2, "Entartete Musik" series



**Franz Schreker** (1878 - 1934, died from a stroke after career blocked, 1934) Recommended listening, opera "Die Gezeichneten" (The Branded), Decca 444-442-2)



**Eric Wolfgang Korngold** (1897-1957), 1920, Private collection (left) Hollywood, 1941 (right). Photos as featured in notes for DG 2-CD set "Rendez-vous With Korngold" Anne Sophie-Otter 459 631-2, songs & chamber music. Recommended listening operas "Die Tode Stadt" (1921), "Das Wunder der Heliane" (1927); Music scores for Warner Bros films "The Sea Hawke", "Captain Blood", etc. (RCA Classic film scores)

Ironically, Wagner's music, in its time, offered a paradigm for this kind of evolution in his chosen area of work, music theatre, and among Jewish composers of the 1930s successfully applying his techniques in opera were **Franz Schreker**, **Irwin Schulhoff** and, before he settled in America, **Eric Korngold**. The Nazis condemned atonality and jazz as degenerate, but they could do nothing to prevent the flowering of Jewish musical talent in the area of music for film by a generation of Jewish composers, referred to above, who fled persecution in Europe to settle and find work in Hollywood. I personally consider their contribution to 20th century music to have been as significant as any other development in the evolution of music and it is again ironic that many of the techniques they used for this new form of music theatre called cinema, were based on Wagnerian theory and practise.

Let us now look at the other side of the coin, for it is also true that Wagner's anti-semitic rhetoric was not matched by his behaviour. The Nazis denied Jewish musicians employment, imprisoned and killed them, but Wagner employed them in high positions of trust at Bayreuth. It is true that he made a

nuisance of himself trying to convert them to Christianity, but it is also true that he inspired, in his colleagues, a degree of professional dedication unusual in the performing arts in any period. Conductor **Hermann Levi**, in letters to his father, a chief rabbi in the town of Giessen, writes of his time preparing for the first Bayreuth Festival:

*"Wagner is the best and noblest of men ... I thank God daily for the privilege to be close to such a man. It is the most beautiful experience of my life."* (April, 1882)

*"The Wagners are so good to me that I am quite touched. I arrived here on June 12th and from that day until July 1st I have lunched and dined every day at Wahnfried. Frequently I called at 12 noon and left only at midnight."* (July 1882) *"...I refuse even to consider whether I deserve an order or any other kind of recognition for "Parsifal". As for my "prestige", I have plenty of that and I feel ... that I am far too well off as it is. Moreover, I have no idea what they could give me.*

*The Order of merit is the appropriate award of the Bavarian Crown, but that might be rather awkward, considering my name is Levi".* (November 1882).

As is widely acknowledged, anti-semiticism was ubiquitous in Europe at that, or any time, but it was not an attitude encouraged by the current wearer of the Bavarian Crown. Ludwig II wrote to Wagner: *"It is good, beloved friend, that you are not going to discriminate between Gentiles and Jews when it comes to performing your exalted, sacred work (Parsifal). Nothing is more odious, more disagreeable than such antagonism. Whatever our religions may be, fundamentally, we are all human beings and as such we are brothers, are we not?"* (October 1881)



**Hermann Levi**, conductor of "Parsifal" at Bayreuth Festival, 1882/83. Photo scanned from "The Real Wagner", by Rudolph Sabor, publ.Andre Deutsch, 1987



**Richard Wagner, 67 & son Siegfried, 11, photo 1880, by P. Biondi e Figlio. Photo scanned from "The Real Wagner", by Rudolph Sabor, publ.Andre Deutsch, 1987**

It is true that some of Wagner's descendants consorted with the Nazis, and that one of the architects of racial theory, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, married into the Wagner family. But not all Wagners collaborated with racists, then or now. Wagner's son, **Siegfried**, also a composer, who died in 1930, refused a request to bar Jewish patrons and artists from Bayreuth. Writing in 1921 he reasoned thus: *"We have a great number of loyal, honest and unselfish Jewish friends. They have frequently given us proof of their devotion. You demand*

*that we should turn all these people from our doors for no other reason than that they are Jews? Is that human? Is that Christian? Is that German? Oh no! If we were really to consider such action, we Germans would first of all have to turn into quite different people .... It is a matter of complete indifference to us whether a human being is a Chinese, a Negro, an American, a Red Indian or a Jew. But we could well take lessons from the Jews in solidarity and in helping one another ... If the Jews are willing to support us, they deserve our particular appreciation, for my father attacked and offended them in his writings. They are entitled to hate Bayreuth, and yet, many of them revere my father's works with genuine enthusiasm, in spite of his attacks on them ..."*

As I mentioned earlier, the Wagner problem only arises for the period following the horrors of World War 2, because his music has consistently made money for musicians and music institutions world wide. If his work had sunk into obscurity because of disinterest, there would be no controversy. But because it is such a money-spinner for the entire music industry, he had to be re-instated, and this was achieved, initially, by attempts to whitewash his character, and downplay his politics. These attempts are still being made, and they are regrettable because truth is always more edifying than evasion, and repression of fact obscures other issues which merit attention - issues besides the uncomfortable fact of Richard Wagner's persistent indulgence in anti-semitic rhetoric during his lifetime.



**Siegfried Wagner (1869 - 1930), photo 1924. Photo scanned from notes for CD Siegfried Wagner "Symphony in C" 1925, CPO 999 531-2.**

In passing, it must be said that Wagner, generally, found stress relief in vociferous complaint, and few targets escaped attack, including Germany itself. In a letter to Franz Liszt, of September 1860, he wrote: *"It is with horror that I contemplate Germany and my plans for the future there. May God forgive me, but all I can see in Germany is small-mindedness, boorish behaviour,. pretence and arrogance ... Believe me, Franz, we have no Fatherland! If I am a German, it is because Germany lives within me."*



**Johanna Rosine Wagner (1774-1848) mother of Richard Wagner; portrait in oils by Ludwig Geyer, 1813, as featured in Wagner, A Documentary Study, Barth, Mach & Voss, Published Thames & Hudson 1975.**



**Ludwig Geyer (1779-1821), self-portrait in oils, detail, c. 1806, step-father of Richard Wagner, as featured in Wagner, A Documentary Study, Barth, Mach & Voss, Published Thames & Hudson 1975.**

And so we return to the question: Was Wagner Jewish? The most interesting, and least explored aspect of Richard Wagner's character lies in his relationship to his stepfather, the painter and actor Ludwig Geyer, from whom he acquired his love of theatre. Various commentators have affirmed that Wagner himself had doubts about his own paternity, but, as I have pointed out, none have explicitly explored the obvious inference, that he may have suspected that he was partly of Jewish descent, through Geyer, whose affair with Wagner's mother pre-dated the death of Wagner's presumed father, Friedrich Wagner, a Police Registrar, who was ill at the time young Richard was conceived, and who died six months after his birth.



**Portrait of Wagner, watercolour, detail, 1853, by Clementine Stockar-Escher, Zurich, as featured in Wagner, A Documentary Study, Barth, Mach & Voss, Published Thames & Hudson 1975.**

Soon after this, Wagner's mother, Johanna, married Ludwig Geyer. Richard Wagner himself, I have read, was known as Richard Geyer until, at the age of 14, he had his name legally changed to Wagner. He had apparently taken some abuse at school because of his name and it has always seemed to me that his later anti-semiticism may have been motivated, at least in part, by sensitivity to this abuse, and by a kind pre-emptive denial to prevent difficulties and suffering arising from prejudice.

Christian hostility to Jews throughout the centuries was only modified when Jews consented to convert to Christianity, and the history of music abounds in cases where musicians have had to convert in order to be able to earn a living. Closer to our own time, Gustav Mahler had to convert in order to secure employment as a conductor at the Vienna Opera. The entire Mendelssohn family also converted and before them, the entire family of Mozart's great librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte. Da Ponte was a picaresque individual, a notorious philanderer and adventurer, from Venice originally, where his Jewish father had converted to Christianity and been baptised together with his three sons. In a wonderful instance of pragmatism, they all took the surname of the Bishop who performed the ceremony.

In allowing performances of Mozart operas, the Nazis conveniently overlooked the fact that most of Mozart's libretti were written by a Jew, though the facts of Da Ponte's heritage cannot have been unknown to them. In contrast they were less lenient in their treatment of a living Jewish writer, Stefan Zweig, whom Richard Strauss initially chose as his second opera librettist following the death of the Austrian poet Hugo von Hoffmanstahl, with whom he had had a long and fruitful collaboration. Joseph Goebbels allowed only one performance the opera Strauss wrote to Zweig's libretto "*Die Schweigsame Frau*", and then blocked further partnership, forbidding Strauss to give employment to a Jew. A letter from Strauss to Zweig criticising Goebbels' "interference" was intercepted by the authorities. Zweig escaped to Switzerland, and Strauss was obliged to work thereafter with the dull and unimaginative, but impeccably Aryan cultural historian Joseph Gregor. None of the operas Strauss wrote during World War 2 have stayed in the repertoire except "*Capriccio*", for which he ended up writing the libretto himself, with conductor Clemens Krauss, because Gregor's work on the idea was too plodding! The whole tangled story is well told in a biography of Strauss by Matthew Boyden (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999).



**In Berlin on February 18, 1934, concert by Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Left to right: Friedrich-Christian Prince of Schaumburg-Lippe, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Richard Strauss, Franz Strauss & Wilhelm Furtwangler.**



**Emmerich Kalman (1882-1953), from composers' photo gallery, *The Golden Age of Operetta*, Readers Digest. Recommended listening operettas "Countess Maritza" "The Gypsy Princess"**

The Nazis overlooked Strauss's politically incorrect indiscretions because his international fame made him a useful cultural ambassador for the Third Reich. In passing, it must be said that their selective application of prejudice does give some support to the thesis that the Holocaust was, in essence, organised theft, to which racial hatred gave a rationale. When convenient, the rationale was forgotten, or at least, set aside. A bizarre offer made to the Jewish composer Emmerich

Kalman provides a case in point. Adolph Hitler himself admired the operettas of Kalman, and, in 1936, shortly after the Anschluss of Austria, conveyed an offer to the composer to make him an honorary Aryan. The offer was delivered by a general of the Third Reich who, in reply to Kalman's understandable concern about its genuineness replied: "I will guarantee it with my life." To which Kalman replied: "But who will guarantee your life?" Immediately following this incident, Kalman and his family hastily left Vienna for their native Hungary, where they were issued with Hungarian passports and travel visas. This enabled a trans-European exit, via Paris, to the USA. Shortly thereafter, the production of Kalman's works in the Greater Reich were forbidden, as had been the performance generally of works by Jewish composers since the advent to power of the Nazi Government in 1933.

It does no credit to Wagner's character to suppose that he may have adopted anti-semiticism as a mask to conceal any hint of Jewish heritage in his background. But the possibility is worth exploring, in the context of his life, his talent, and his creative aims. He was not born into a Jewish heritage, nor was he Jewish by religion, so the hypothesis we are exploring is not a normal case of denial, such as, for example, a youthful rebellion against parental authority. It is a case of pre-emptive denial of a possibility. We are not dealing with a certainty in Wagner's life, but with a question to which he could never be given a clear answer. In this context, he may have felt that being Jewish, or being thought to be Jewish, was not a burden that he wished to bear. The artistic aims he set for himself from an early age were enormously ambitious; indeed they were grandiose and, on the face of it, impossible to achieve. In the end, they were only achieved by a miracle, the timely support of an adolescent admirer, who ascended to the throne of Bavaria, and who became his patron, Ludwig II.

What were Wagner's aims? As they finally evolved they were to achieve a revolution in the art of opera, or, as he defined it, music drama. With Ludwig's help, he was largely successfully in a number of respects which it is worth summarising. He pioneered the dissolution of the classical system of harmony, and paved the way for many developments in music of the 20th century, including new techniques for giving music a

narrative role in drama. He embraced the use of new systems for instruments and new instruments, especially in the brass sections of the orchestra allowing him to write innovative chromatic harmonies, of which other composers, such as Brahms and Schumann, strongly disapproved. Brahms refused to write for the new brass instruments.

Wagner also pioneered innovations in theatre design, which included hiding the orchestra in a pit below the stage, and



**Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-86); coloured photo presented by the king to Wagner, as featured in *Wagner, A Documentary Study*, Barth, Mach & Voss, Published Thames & Hudson 1975.**



blacking out the lights in the auditorium. He overcame enormous hostility and inertia to achieve these changes. It is possible to imagine that, in some private moments of reflection early in his life, he must have decided that such aims were difficult enough, without adding to them the burden of racial and cultural prejudice which came with being, or being thought to be, Jewish. Such fears could well have originated when he was an impressionable adolescent, if he had had early experience of prejudice, through being teased at school for being Jewish.

Such speculation is only interesting if there is to be found, in his creative work, any resonance of such an issue, any traces of cultural ambiguity. Music historians have been quick to point out anti-semitic elements in Wagner's libretti: the gold-loving Nibelung lord Alberich as a symbol of Jewish materialism; the jealous rival songsmith Beckmesser, in the Mastersingers of Nuremberg, incapable of original work, who steals the work of others, a symbol of the kind of Jewish creativity Wagner attacked in his polemic writing. But is there reverse side to this coin? Are there any symbols in his libretti, sympathetic to a Jewish heritage in European culture? Surprisingly, there are, but they are of an esoteric nature, and they are not reflective of orthodox Judaism any more than were Wagner's Christian references reflective of Christian orthodoxy.

To find our sources we must turn to what is often described as the "hidden stream" of Western culture, which is rich in the very lore on which Wagner drew for his libretti: lore which encompasses the fate of Jerusalem, the role of the Knights Templar, their connection to King Arthur and the Knights of the Holy Grail, and the related mythology of the Ring Lords of antiquity. These themes are being re-explored in an explosion of new writings which have emerged on the back of the discoveries by archeologists of ancient manuscripts pre-dating the establishment of Christian orthodoxy in the fourth to the seventh centuries. But these ideas were very much in vogue in the latter decades of the 19th century, where they infused much art of the time, from pre-Raphaelite painting to the work of Richard Wagner.

We start with an early opera, *"The Flying Dutchman"*. This figure is synonymous with that of the "Wandering Jew", in fact the two are linked in meaning: later interpretations of the "Dutchman" legend attributed his curse to demonic punishment; but behind the same curse of endless journeying is also a symbol of the Jewish Diaspora. Interestingly, when the Dutchman does come to shore in Wagner's libretti, it is the Gentile father of Senta, the beloved, who displays greed for material wealth, whereas the Dutchman's needs are spiritual. Spanning the Ring cycle are Wagner's two Grail operas, *"Lohengrin"* and *"Parsifal"*. The Grail Knights are, according to neo-Gnostic interpretations, custodians of the family tree of Jesus (Joshua) and Mary (Magdalene), whose heirs were the Merovingian monarchs of Southern France, until deposed in the 7th century by machinations and assassinations arranged by the Roman church. The politics of that period are quite fascinating, and are too complex to elaborate on here. Suffice to say that if the Merovingian blood line was Jewish, and of Royal descent, the heretical details were a threat to the newly established Carolingian dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire. The facts had to be suppressed, belief in them declared a heresy, and, to ensure suppression, such heresy had to be punishable by death.

The facts of a usurped Royal, Jewish line went underground, and re-surfaced in esoteric form, in the Grail legends, and in fairy stories of Princes and Princesses deprived of their

inheritance, such as Cinderella and the Sleeping Beauty. Whether or not Wagner knew of these references, it is to these legends he turned for the content of his operas.

In terms of his opera *"Lohengrin"*, the Knight Lohengrin magically appears to restore Elsa to her rightful place on the throne, of which she has been deprived by trickery. The condition of his help is that she should never ask his name or from whence he came. To those who understood the riddle, there is here, the unspoken inference that Lohengrin himself is of the Jewish blood line, information which he cannot disclose, either in fact or in name, or else he will have to "return from whence he came". Could there possibly be, in this and in the Dutchman story, an subjective echo of Wagner's own feared identity as a Jew? If so, this would co-exist as a buried sub-text buried within the wider meanings.

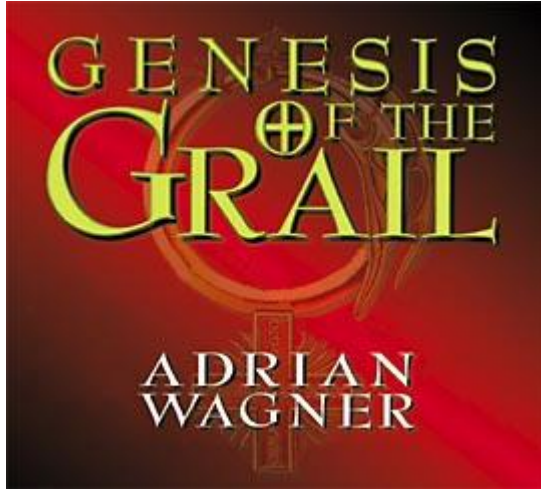
Since Wagner read widely, and studied deeply in such matters, it is probable that he was acquainted with Gnostic interpretations of the Grail mythology, particularly as he is known to have visited the mysterious village of Rennes-le-Chateau in the South of France before writing *"Parsifal"*. This otherwise normal country town purports to be where the treasure of the Knights Templar was hidden by the Cathars after the 13th century Albigensian Crusade against them instigated by the Catholic Church, and could be construed to be in the area of the actual location of the events of *"Parsifal"*, that is, the location of the castle of the Grail, Montsalvat, which the libretto describes as being *"in the country in the character of the northern mountains of Gothic Spain"*. The treasure was two-fold, encompassing both the material treasure rescued from the Temple of Jerusalem, in 70AD, but was also supposed to include the Grail itself, which is no doubt what drew Wagner to visit Rennes-le-Chateau.

Whatever else Wagner may have known about the Grail legend, he already had his own conception of what it meant to him before making this visit. *"Parsifal"*, his last opera, was written in 1878, but in an essay written in 1849 (titled *"Die Wibelungen"*) he saw it as a relic originating in India, the birthplace of the original Aryan civilisation, and one which embodied a transcendent and transforming power, pre-dating Christianity itself. There is no historical justification for such a supposition, except in the sense that the Grail has always embodied an idea in the form of a vessel, and many of the cultural values underlying Western thought do have their origins in the East (as brilliantly shown by English writer Stephen Oppenheimer in his exhaustive 500 page study *"Eden In The East"*, published by Phoenix, 1999).

The symbolism in *"Parsifal"* is sufficiently elastic to allow a number of interpretations, including racist ones. What sin or condition, exactly, is being redeemed and healed in *"Parsifal"*? Is it a moral one? A cultural one? A racial one? It must be said that Wagner deliberately leaves that question open to interpretation, and there are no shortage of interpretations. However, the traditional version has the Grail Knights as proto-Teutonic Knights defending a pure Christian-Aryan heritage, and defending it against incursions by the alien, pagan threat of the magician Klingsor, who seeks to divert them from their quest through the wiles of his captive Flower Maidens, embodiments of sensual gratification. The ailing leader, Amfortas, has been compromised by temptation, and some commentators find, in the leader's "wound which will not heal", a sexual malady. Parsifal is the "wise fool" who can retain his innocence, resist temptation and thus bring redemption to the community of the Grail.

The Nazis, of course, characterised Klingsor as a Jew, but a re-casting of the same story could produce an inversion of racial

roles, and it is precisely such a re-casting which has been embraced by a direct descendant of Richard Wagner, the composer Adrian Wagner, who lives in the United Kingdom; at least that is the inference one must draw from his association with writer Laurence Gardner, author of *"Bloodline of the Holy Grail"*, *"Genesis of the Grail Kings"* and *"Realm of the Ring Lords"*, all published since 1996. Adrian Wagner has written companion musical suites to two of these volumes and has released these on CD. The reader may access these CDs, and Gardner's books through Adrian Wagner's website:



<http://www.mediaquest.co.uk/awggk.html>

Laurence Gardner's thesis enlarges on themes brought to public notice in the 1982 best seller by Baignent, Leigh & Lincoln *"The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail"*, a work which draws on many sources including the apocryphal scriptures and Gnostic writings which have emerged from archeological discovers over the past two centuries.

A summary below explains how this agenda discovers a "Jewish bloodline" context in the Grail legend, supplanting the orthodox Christian one, and, by inference, allows a similar context in the Wagnerian Grail operas supplanting the traditional "Teutonic Knights" context with its overtones of German nationalism, and Aryan racial purity.

An entry in Cosima Wagner's diary of December 2, 1887, confirms the composer's ambivalence about the opera's meaning for him, at the time of its composition, when he says to her: *"I shall still write Parsifal for my wife, but I wouldn't say it's a sign of faith in the German spirit any longer"*. It is quite likely that this remark reflects Wagner's disenchantment with the German public, which, by then, he had come to feel had given him insufficient support and backing in the creation of the Bayreuth Festival. The first Festpielhaus lost money, and six years elapsed before it could reopen, in 1882, by which time Wagner was exhausted and disenchanted by the response to his embrace of German nationalism. His anti-semiticism had been a calculated part of that posture, and, despite it, support from Jewish musicians in the Festival, and from Berlin Jews of the Festival were significant factors in its survival. Wagner lived to see *Parsifal* produced in the 1882 Festival, but died the next year.

The word 'Grail' has other meanings beside the one Wagner attributed to it. Was he aware of them? In the Gnostic tradition the word has a double meaning: on the one hand it is said to be a contraction of San(g)-Real - which means, in French, Royal Blood, and, in code, means, in turn, that the Grail is a document which provides proof of the line of descent of "royal blood": the blood being that of David and Solomon,

through Joshua, or Jesus, and his wife, Mariam, or Mary Magdalene, Joshua having been an heir to the throne of Jerusalem by direct descent, as was his brother, James. (To clarify, 'Jesus' is the Greek version of the Hebrew name 'Joshua' or 'Yeshua' and came into circulation when the New Testament Gospels were translated into Greek from the original Aramaic). In addition, the concept of the Grail as a vessel has the esoteric meaning of "the womb which carries the Holy Blood", and is a reverential symbol of Mary Magdalene, who, to this day, is still the subject of cult worship in areas in the South of France, that is, in the former lands of the Merovingian monarchs.

The traditional meaning of the Grail as the cup which carried the blood of Jesus shed when on the Cross is a compatible, or at least an analogous meaning, and it is, of course, the meaning Wagner illustrated in *"Parsifal"*, composing music of extraordinary power to portray the wondrous, healing properties of the Grail. The belief that blood itself has magical properties is one of great antiquity.



**Richard Wagner, age 58, photo 1871 by Franz Hanfstaengl, from "The Real Wagner", by Rudolph Sabor, publ. Andre Deutsch, 1987,.**

Wagner drew on it for the rites portrayed in the final scenes of *"Parsifal"*; scenes which have as much affinity with the earlier religion of Mithras as they do with orthodox Christian worship; and the rituals observed in *Parsifal* are also related to rites of Freemasonry, as might be expected considering the links between the Knights Templar and Masonry.

Whatever Wagner's acquaintance with such diverse aspects of Grail lore, he only took what he needed for *"Parsifal"*, a selective process he also used in deriving material from legend his other operas. It's worth mentioning, at this point, that *"Parsifal"* also revisits a theme which Wagner dealt with in an earlier opera, that of the conflict between flesh and spirit. That other opera is *"Tanhäuser"*, another work in which Wagner, while paying lip service to orthodoxy, displays dissent. The dissent occurs during the scene where Tanhäuser has returned from his futile trip to Rome to beg forgiveness for his sexual sins, committed during his sojourn in Venusberg. The Pope withholds forgiveness, and Tanhäuser bitterly refers to his rejection in a German phrase of ambivalent meaning, sometimes translated as "I saw him who is God's messenger", and sometimes as "I saw him who claims to represent God". Lost in the garment of piety with which Wagner otherwise clothed his libretto, this Gnostic barb was overlooked, and Wagner was accused of having written a pro-Catholic opera by those to whom it mattered, whose sectarian interests he was thought to have betrayed.

Is it possible to sum up the foregoing? All one can say is that ironies abound. Despite Wagner's anti-semitic rhetoric there is consistent evidence of his interaction with Jewish artists throughout his life, both on a personal basis, and

professionally, after the establishment of Bayreuth: and there was a persistent groundswell of support for his innovations from Jewish people in Berlin, in the early years of the Festival, which continued despite the hurtful re-publication of his earlier tracts. Much of the information used in this survey comes from a recent book by a Jewish writer Paul Lawrence Rose, *'Wagner: Race & Revolution'* published by Faber & Faber in 1992, and other information and quotations from correspondence come from *A Documentary Study* by Herbert Barth, Dietrich Mack and Egon Voss, published by Thames & Hudson in 1975, and *"The Real Wagner"* by Rudolph Sabor, published by Andre Deutsch in 1987, and further quotations from books I have not yet read are included courtesy of James Whitehead.

Wagner's music is here to stay. But can he himself be forgiven? I discussed these matters in recent emails with a long-time Jewish friend in London, a connection maintained since our days together at Cambridge University in England in the 1950s. I suggested that the difference between Adolph Hitler and Richard Wagner was this. Hitler, who wished to be a painter, gave up art for politics, and, in his impotent and vengeful frustration, refused Jews employment and then murdered millions. Wagner never gave up on art, and though he voiced complaints about Jewry, never refused a Jew employment, and never committed homicide. My friend was kind enough to say that, as an anti-semitic, Wagner was an amateur. The painter was a professional. That is probably about the best one can say for Richard Wagner, the man. The music speaks for itself.

But as for the question: was Wagner of Jewish heritage? If that DNA testing I mentioned earlier could be done, and if it turned out that this was true, then the question would arise - Could Richard Wagner be acclaimed in history as one of the great Jewish composers of the nineteenth century? Such a verdict would please as many people as it would annoy. But it would be a final, fitting irony, in the career of a man in whose life ironies abound.

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## Postscript

In the aftermath of World War 2, the main problem facing those in the music industry who wished to "reinstate" the music of Richard Wagner was its posthumous use for political purposes by the Nazis. A thesis needs to be written about music as polemic. Most of the hijacks have been completely inappropriate. The Labor party in Australia have "adopted" the Jupiter theme from Holst's Planets Suite for their theme song - to assume nobility of purpose for themselves. This embrace is by a political party formed largely by Irish revolutionary socialists who still despise the British! The "British" national anthem is a German tune, which was still doing the round of German states at the time of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The Jubel-Overture by Swiss composer Joachim Raff (who taught Liszt how to orchestrate) sounds as if it uses "God Save The King" as its main theme, but in fact the piece was written shortly after the aforementioned jubilee to celebrate the 25th year of the reign of Adolf, Duke of Nassau! My essay [\*"Variations on a racist theme"\*](#) documents the embrace of the tune by the United States, to new words, and titled "America". In that form, for a hundred years, it rivalled the "Star Spangled banner" as America's official national anthem,

despite its association with England, with whom the colonist had fought a war.

The German national anthem in use during the Nazi era is based on the theme from the slow movement of Haydn's "Emperor" String Quartet, but the ignominy to which the tune was subjected has not resulted in prohibition of performance of that work, nor has it deterred Protestants the world over from singing the hymn set to its melody "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken".

It is the peculiar quality of music that it provides a simulacrum in sound for "events" created by the human central nervous system, "events" called "emotions" and these "events" can be directed for political purposes. Thus "pride" feels the same, whoever feels it, but the object of pride can change according to the social context which inspires it.

I have read one commentary on the Nazi use of Wagner's music which points out how stupid it was of the Nazi hierarchy to take on board the Nordic gods as their heroes, since the demise of the gods was specifically prophesied by Wagner in the "Ring" cycle. I realise this kind of commentary does not assuage the distress of people who were there in Germany during the 1930s hearing the 'Rienzi' overture played at the start of Nazis rallies, following by public speeches threatening and denouncing them because of their race and cultural heritage.

Perhaps it is best to allow Wagner to speak for himself on these matters, quoting directly from his own writings. Prophetically he wrote: *"Is the German already tottering to his fall? ... Woe to us and to the world if the nation itself were saved and the German folk remained but the German spirit had taken flight for the sake of power"*.

Did he anticipate Hitler? *"The German folk does not want demagogues ... Do we ever see a conqueror, a forcible usurper, whether folk or individual, that does not seek to found his wilful annexation on religious, mythical or other trumped-up covenants?"*

The author of the cautionary tale about misuse of the Ring of world power also wrote: *"To conquer without ever considering how they are to be won over! Never to ask oneself how Holland, Switzerland, and so forth are to be converted into friends! Only for the army ... It is not the Jews we have to complain about, for each organism tried to further its own interests."*

The development of scientific weapons of war alarmed him: *"It can but arouse our apprehension to see the progress of the art of war departing from the springs of moral force and turning more and more to the mechanical: here the rawest forces of the lower nature powers are brought into artificial play ... Already a grim and ghastly sight is offered by the armored Monitors, against which the stately sailing ship avails no more: dumb serving-men, no longer with the looks of men, attend these monsters. Art invents torpedoes for the sea, and dynamite cartouches, or the like, for everywhere else."* And again: *"It is thinkable that all this, with art and science, valour, point of honour, life and chattels should one day fly into the air through some incalculable accident ... Then it might really look 'as if God had made the world that the devil might take it."*

<http://www.revolve.com.au/polemic/wagner.html>